

USING BIBLICAL STORYTELLING IN PASTORAL CARE  
TO INITIATE SPIRITUAL TRANSFORMATION

A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY

GORDON-CONWELL THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE

DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

BY

APRIL LOVE-FORDHAM

MAY 2011

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Gordon Conwell Theological Seminary  
130 Essex Street  
South Hamilton, MA 01982-2361





## DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my husband, Steve, and my two sons, Brent and Kit,  
whose stories God wove together with mine even before the beginning of time  
crafting, as only God can do, a truly amazing love story.

If I have a hope, it's that God sat over the dark nothing  
And wrote you and me, specifically, into the story,  
And put us in with the sunset and the rainstorm as though to say,  
"Enjoy your place in my story.  
The beauty of it means you matter,  
And you can create within it even as I have created you."

-- Donald Miller, *A Million Miles in a Thousand Years*

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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this thesis is to address a gap in modern pastoral care instruction by developing a guidebook for pastors and lay people interested in the ancient practice of using biblical storytelling – using the narratives of scripture – to initiate transformation in the hearts of care receivers. To that end, this thesis constructs a pastoral storytelling methodology and guidebook.

The pastoral storytelling methodology is focused on pastoral care situations such as in-office counseling, hospital visitation, and in-home visitation. But the methodology is not limited to use in formal counseling situations. It is designed so that it can be used any time and place pastoral care is needed. The guidebook is equally useful when used by pastors or lay people.

While scholarly examination of existing work is conducted and supporting theology is discussed in the early chapters of the thesis, the thesis rapidly moves toward developing a very practical approach for putting the art of retelling the stories of the Bible into use in pastoral counseling situations through The Pastoral Storytelling Guidebook. The guidebook offers a useful manual to picking appropriate biblical stories based on the care-receiver's needs, learning the stories, telling the stories, discussing the stories, and using follow-up activities that will allow the care receiver to immerse themselves in the biblical stories. Case studies using the methodology are also documented and evaluated.

## CHAPTER 1

### PASTORAL CARE OVERLOOKS THE POWER OF BIBLICAL STORYTELLING

The education of Christian counselors has long been focused on utilizing the teachings of modern psychology and then tailoring these teachings into appropriate lessons for the Christian counseling student with an overlay of Christian theology. Many prominent authors and educators lament that this coupling is often too loose with a bias toward psychology not theology. J. Harold Ellens describes this approach to teaching Christian counselors as a “psychological reductionism of pastoral theology” (Ellens 1990, 245). Seward Hiltner describes the inherent problems in this approach where secular is overlaid with theological as creating a misplaced “vitality that comes to be associated with non-theological orientations” (Hiltner 1957, 220). Charles V. Gerkin voices similar concerns in that while “psychological and psychotherapeutic concerns have unquestionably been dominant... concern for the recovery of pastoral counseling’s theological roots is currently being voiced from all sides” (Gerkin 1984, 11). In describing where this recovery might originate, Gerkins does not dwell on singling out theology as the answer. Instead he turns toward the potential for the use of biblical narratives. He believes that by engaging the biblical narratives in order to initiate change in the individual, that it not only puts the care-receiver into the living and healing word, but gives them the opportunity to evaluate their lives in the light of biblical teachings. He goes on to say that when biblical narratives are used in correlation with modern psychological thought, the care-receiver is given superior care.

Pastoral care instruction in seminary and other lay organizations has neglected this aspect of the transforming and healing power of the Holy Spirit that is invoked when the biblical narratives are told and applied to our congregant's lives during pastoral care situations. And yet, scripture teaches that the word of God has transformative power. We see the prophet Nathan, in the Old Testament, using narratives to initiate transformation in King David. We see Jesus, in the New Testament, using narratives for the same purpose. We see Paul repeating the biblical stories in the epistles to invoke change in the early church. I believe that the neglect of using scripture, in particular, biblical narratives, for pastoral care situations can result in a narrowed understanding of what constitutes the abundant human life. It leaves the pastoral care giver in the position of boiling down the biblical narratives into theology that they then levy on the care-receiver. It does not allow the care-receiver to hear God's word for themselves. Nor does it allow the care-receiver to interpret God's word as it speaks particularly to their situation. And as Nathan, Jesus, and Paul were all aware, stories applied to one's situation are much more memorable than theology applied to a situation. People can take stories with them, retell them, and learn different things from them in different situations and as they grow spiritually.

I also believe that the primary impediment to the Christian counselor's use of biblical narratives in offering pastoral care is the lack of specific methodologies available. For instance, although Gerkins identifies the potential for their use, he does not develop specific methodologies for the utilization of biblical narratives in pastoral counseling. This thesis addresses this gap in pastoral care instruction by developing a



guidebook for pastors and lay people interested in using the narratives of scripture to initiate transformation in the lives of care-receivers.

I am aware that there will certainly be criticism from those who will see using biblical storytelling in pastoral care as a primitive technique which is not as sophisticated as applying theology to one's life. Thomas Manson goes a long way toward answering this concern in his book, *The Teaching of Jesus*, by stating that stories are, "not an illustration to help one through a theological discussion, but are rather a mode of religious experience" (Manson 1935, 73). Kenneth Bailey takes this one step further when he gives the example of the discussion in Luke 9:57-58<sup>1</sup> (Bailey 1983, xi). A man offers himself to Jesus by saying, "I will follow you wherever I go." A western theologian might answer the man with a systematic discussion of what it means to follow Jesus and whether or not a human can make that choice or if God has predestined the choice. The theologian might discuss the spiritual dimension of the places Jesus ascends to or descends to and whether the human made of flesh and blood can actually follow Jesus there – or would even want to. It would be a discussion of facts as the theologian understands them to be true. Bailey points out that Jesus replied to the man with a very simple story: "Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head" (Luke 9:58). Jesus' response lays a claim to the man's life causing him both to reevaluate his own declaration and to respond with a new commitment. Biblical stories do not behave as theology behaves; they are in and of themselves, a religious experience. They take us into spiritual places – demanding responses from us - where cold hard facts can't go.

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<sup>1</sup> All Scriptural quotations in the text are from the New Revised Standard Version, unless otherwise noted.

I doubt that it will just be theologians who criticize this work. Perhaps professionally trained counselors and psychotherapists will also see this thesis as a dangerous way to approach the hard work of offering counseling. While, this thesis does not attempt to displace the approaches of those disciplines and is not a one-size fits all methodology, scripture does promise that God's word will not come back to him void (Isaiah 55:10-11). Biblical storytelling is a way where the powerful, healing, far reaching word of God can be released into the life of those in need. An added benefit is that it does not take a highly educated individual to tell God's stories offering consolation or encouraging right living. It is an ancient and proven healing art which has been forgotten. Walter Breuggemann tries to reclaim this art in his book, "Texts that Linger, Words that Explode." He writes that hearing the right biblical story at the right moment is revelatory "disclosing something that without the story being retold would not otherwise be known, seen, or heard" (Breuggemann 2000, 1). He says biblical storytelling takes what has been hovering in dormancy and becomes available experience to the hearer.

Before venturing further into what questions this thesis will address, it is important to define what constitutes a story. Annette Simmons states, "Just as knowledge can become wisdom, so do facts become a story" (Simmons 2002, 50). Many mediums can tell a story: music, dance, dramatizations, paintings, the spoken word, etc. The options are endless. In each of these instances, facts or truths take on new meaning when they are woven together by the chosen medium. For the sake of this paper, I will include all of the stories found in the Bible whether historical, parable, poetry, metaphor, allegory, or analogy. Stories, no matter what the medium, all weave together truths that

are stronger than isolated facts by placing the truth in the context of who, when, and where.

In summary, this thesis addresses the question: How can pastoral care givers, whether ordained or lay care givers, use biblical narratives to initiate spiritual transformation in those in their care? My expectation is that a methodology will be produced that allows pastors and lay care givers to enhance their ability to take care of their flocks. The methodology developed by this thesis is focused on pastoral care situations such as in-office counseling, hospital visitation, and in-home visitation. But the methodology is not limited to use in formal counseling situations. It is designed so that it can be used any time and place pastoral care is needed. The guidebook will be equally useful when used by pastors or lay people.

I first became aware of the need for such a methodology in seminary. My family has a gene for storytelling. In fact, I have a cousin who makes her living traveling to different events in the North Carolina Mountains and telling stories (mostly stories about my most unusual family). I thought I would certainly have this storytelling gene too, but my natural born storytelling skill (or lack thereof) demonstrated during my first sermon was met with much rather intense criticism from my preaching class evaluators. Feeling that I should not give up and believing that my storytelling gene must just need developing, I bought Thomas Boomershine's book, *Story Journey: An Invitation to the Gospel as Storytelling*. This book not only helped me make biblical stories come alive during my sermons, but it introduced me to the concept of using biblical stories as a way to initiate spiritual transformation in pastoral care situations. In his book, Boomershine, in an aside to his main focus which is teaching laity and clergy how to tell biblical stories,

gives an account of a woman plagued by agoraphobia who had approached her pastor for help. Her pastor asked her to give him the name of a few church friends whom she could trust explicitly. He then arranged for a meeting of the woman and her friends. At this meeting he told them the story of Peter walking on water (Matthew 14:22-33). Together the group discussed Peter's overwhelming fear, which caused him to sink, contrasting it with Jesus' compassion and power that saved Peter from drowning. In the story, Jesus grabs hold of the sinking Peter and pulls him to safety. The woman immediately related to Peter's great desire to follow Jesus – a desire that would lead him to jump off a perfectly good boat into rough seas. She related to the, perhaps uncontrollable and certainly overwhelming, fear Peter felt. And she took great comfort in Jesus' compassionate, strong, and yet, no coddling response. Jesus did not enable Peter's fear by saying "now, now, it's okay." But Jesus says, "You of little faith, why did you doubt?" She could take comfort in a Jesus who protected Peter and at the same time challenged Peter to have more faith. After a long discussion of the story, the pastor enlisted the woman and her friends to learn the story so that they could retell it anytime the woman needed to hear it. Whenever the woman was faced with a situation where she was afraid, she would either tell herself the story or call one of her friends to tell it to her. Over time the woman's agoraphobia improved to the point that she no longer required medication to perform her daily tasks. A great celebration took place the day the woman and her friends met at a boat dock and told each other the story before boarding a boat for a dinner cruise (Boomershine 1988, 99).

The benefit of this approach to pastoral care was not only the fact that the woman's mental health improved, but that a loving community of Christ's followers

surrounded her with the Word of God. In essence, they bonded around the Word of God. It was through the Holy Spirit being active in the biblical story that they came together, offered pastoral care, and grew stronger in relationship to one another supporting each other in their Christian walk.

Not long after encountering Boomershine's book, I began to apply this concept of using biblical storytelling to my own life and ministry. During a period of my life when I felt overwhelmed and disconnected from my relationship with Christ, I learned the story of Mary and Martha (Luke 10:38-42). By focusing on how this Bible story intersected with my own story, these words of scripture had an enormous affect in helping me deal with the stress in my life. I not only learned the story to tell myself, but I enlisted my husband and sons to tell me the story whenever they sensed I was stressed. Again, through the scripture our family bonded. Before this time, although my sons may not have been able to express that their mom was under a fair amount of stress, they were certainly aware that Mom was not her best self – distracted and forgetful. By my being able to talk to my family about it and enlist their help, several things happened. They became familiar with a particular biblical story and its different facets; they learned that scripture really does relate to modern life; they learned that we can turn our problems over to God; and they learned not only that we often require support from others to live faithful Christian lives, but that God could use them to be supportive. It was a wonderful experience.

During a pastoral care opportunity when I was ministering to a woman who wanted to give her husband a second chance after his infidelity, I watched biblical storytelling have a profound effect on a congregant's life. The woman came to me,

worried that she was having a hard time forgiving her husband. So I thought it would be appropriate to tell her the story of God forgiving King David after his affair. She continued to read the story in the scripture and meditate on it. I had not expected the effect the story would have on their marriage. I expected her to see that forgiveness was possible and offer it to her husband. But after several weeks of meditating on the story, she came to believe that God was telling her to have a frank and honest discussion with her husband about whether he had truly repented of his actions or not. She had noticed in the story that King David repented after Nathan came to David. And since this was not the first time her husband had been unfaithful – he had been unfaithful during their engagement too – she was unsure if his heart was repentant of his infidelity. In what was a very calm and insightful conversation, her husband admitted that he was not able, did not have a desire to, and did not want to try to be faithful. Although she felt strongly that marriage should be preserved if at all possible, she believed that it would be inappropriate to stay in a marriage under these circumstances. Even after months of seeing marriage therapists, it had never occurred to her to have such a frank discussion with her husband. It was simply assumed by all involved that he was sorry and would try to be faithful. But through the Holy Spirit guiding her among the words of this story, what would probably have been a continual cycle of heartbreak in her life and the life of her children was eliminated. She ended her marriage through a divorce. It was not an easy time for her, but she believed strongly God was guiding her. After years of practicing biblical storytelling in my own congregation, I have witnessed numerous other incidents of watching the stories contained in the word of God transform the lives of believers

through this unique kind of pastoral care. I believe others may benefit in their ministry by being taught a biblical storytelling methodology.

In doing so, Chapter 2 of this thesis examines the theological framework for biblical story telling. Is biblical storytelling a faithful way for pastors and laity to offer pastoral care? What role does the Holy Spirit often play in spiritual transformation that is accomplished through storytelling? It will also expose the biblical examples of storytelling that initiated transformation.

Although I could find nothing in my literature review that directly addressed the possibilities of teaching pastors and lay leaders how to use biblical storytelling to initiate spiritual transformation in person-to-person pastoral care giving, an evaluation of work that roughly applies to this topic will be contained Chapter 3.

The guidebook will be contained in Chapter 4. The guidebook will teach not only how, when, and where to tell the narratives of the Bible in order to initiation transformation, but it will also identify which narratives may be appropriate to tell in which pastoral care situations. It will contain the following subchapters:

- The Biblical Story Teller
  - Techniques on how to tell biblical stories
  - How to prepare the story to capture the spiritual truths presented in the scripture
  - How to tell the story without bias and without leading the care-receiver
- Ministering to the Care-receiver
  - When story telling is appropriate and when it is not
  - How to give the Holy Spirit space to work without undue interpretation

- How and when to help the care-receiver interpret the story
- Post-Story Care Activities
- Getting the Whole Community involved
  - How the larger church family can be involved in supporting each other through storytelling
- Suggested stories and their applications
  - Stories for different pastoral care situations
  - Five biblical stories every pastor needs to be able to tell

Chapter 5 will contain case studies from my own ministry. The scope of this thesis is to develop the guidebook, but not to implement it. The research that I have done thus far has been empirical in nature resulting from my own experiences as a pastor in a parish setting. The research methodology contained in this chapter revolves around pastoral care that I offer as a part of my parish ministry. I will observe those in my care through observations and interviews recording them as case studies.

The final chapter, Chapter 6, will be reserved for my personal summary of the thesis. What insight did I gain from the process and product of this project? What can I offer to the reader that will serve as ways to enhance, broaden, sharpen and refine their pastoral care ministries?

My prayer is that by developing a methodology and guidebook that will teach care givers to incorporate the biblical stories into their pastoral care ministries, the kingdom of God will be served and care-receivers will be further sanctified – set aside for holy use in that kingdom.



## CHAPTER 2

### A THEOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK FOR USING BIBLICAL STORYTELLING IN PASTORAL CARE

If, by way of the Scriptures, we were to watch God interact with human beings, what, if anything, would we learn about how God chooses to relate to us as people? What might that teach those of us who care for God's people about how we might effectively relate to those in our care? What might that teach us about how we can facilitate transformation in one another's lives?

#### The Old Testament Storytellers

The following paragraphs look at the way God has interacted with humanity through storytellers in the Old Testament. We will watch as God sends storytellers to those individuals needing pastoral care. And I believe that if we look closely at how God has arranged these interactions, we can glean how God might want storytellers to interact in our lives today.

#### **Nathan and King David**

During the rule of King David, God raised up the prophet Nathan to speak the Word of God to David. Early in their relationship, David decided to build a house for God. Nathan first advises him to build it, but then God comes to Nathan and tells him that it is David's son who will build the temple, not David (2 Samuel 7). Nathan not only speaks these disappointing words to David, but journeys with him as David takes them to heart and internalizes them. In doing so, Nathan develops a relationship with David. The

fact that a relationship develops between the two men is an important note. Nathan develops a rapport with David by not only speaking truth to him, but also by journeying beside David as the truth sinks into David's plans. Those offering pastoral care through storytelling will do well to model Nathan's behavior of truth speaking and journeying alongside those in their care even before storytelling begins.

It is later that Nathan uses this relationship to approach David with the intent of initiating repentance in a now unrepentant David (2 Samuel 12). David has had sex with the wife of Uriah, his loyal follower. A child results and David arranges for Uriah's death on the battlefield. David then marries Uriah's wife. The Lord is obviously not pleased with David's behavior and it falls upon Nathan, as David's prophet, to address this with David. Interestingly, Nathan does not approach David with the cold raw truth – an approach which may have triggered less than optimal emotions in David. The cold raw truth may have angered David against Nathan, rather than helping David see his sins for what they were. A direct approach may have turned David's heart cold instead of initiating transformation in David.

Brilliantly, Nathan approaches David with a story, "There were two men in a certain city, the one rich and the other poor..." (2 Samuel 12:1). The story is of a rich man who feeds the poor man's pet to his own guests. David immediately reacts to the story – perhaps overreacts – becoming angry at the rich man for having no pity on the poor man and even calling for the rich man's death. The storytelling approach disarms David. It allows David to put his guard down and listen to Nathan. It is now that David is ready to see his place in the story. Nathan says, "David, you are the rich man." Nathan goes on to contrast all that God has done for David with David's behavior. And

he then informs David of the consequences of his sins. In turn, David confesses his sin. God used Nathan's story to initiate transformation in David – to help him see himself in a situation where the cold hard truth may have been too much to bear. I believe that God can use our retelling of the biblical stories to initiate the same kind of transformation in those who are in our care.

### **Joab and the Wise Woman of Tekoa**

King David's heart has been set against his son Absalom and David has banished Absalom from the kingdom. Joab, the general of David's army, wants to encourage David to reconcile with his son. So Joab recruits the wise woman from Tekoa to approach David with a story (2 Samuel 14). She begins with, "My husband is dead. I had two sons. The two of them got into a fight..." In the story, one of the sons kills the other and now a family member wants to take the life of the living son in payment for the murder of his brother. She begs the King not to let this happen. Once again, David reacts to the story by offering the woman's son protection from the family member. It is now that David is ready to see himself in the story. The wise woman helps David see himself in the story as she says, "Why then have you planned such a thing [to exile Absalom] against the people of God? For in giving this decision [to protect her living son] the king convicts himself [of mistreating his own son]..." She informs David that his behavior towards Absalom should be one of reconciliation not exile. David accepts this and makes plans to bring Absalom back into the kingdom. God uses this story to help David see that God wants him to reconcile with Absalom. Of course, David doesn't really reconcile with him. He brings Absalom back into the Kingdom, but will have nothing to do with him. Hence the storytelling is only half effective. Nonetheless, God

knows that stories can work upon our heart by invoking emotions that make us identify with characters in the story in ways that the cold hard truth cannot. If Joab had simply told the king that his decision to exile Absalom was wrong, the king would most likely not have heard and, perhaps, focused his anger on Joab rather than having an open heart to hear the truth. This way, David first claims a truth within the story. David is initially not personally attached to that truth. He doesn't see himself in it. But then Nathan helps David apply the truth to David's life by saying, "You are the man." (2 Samuel 12:7). The person using biblical stories to initiate transformation in those within their care, should not only tell the story, but be willing to help the one hearing the story to interpret it as needed.

### **Jotham and Abimelech**

Abimelech wanted to be king, although he was not in line for the position (Judges 9). He was only a half heir and there were seventy heirs before him. However, he went to the other side of his family, gained their support, and hired men to help him kill the seventy heirs. But he only killed sixty-nine heirs. Jotham, the youngest lived. After Abimelech's coronation, Jotham shows up with a story, "The trees set out one day to anoint a king for themselves. They said to Olive Tree..." The point of the story is to show Abimelech's supporters that they have been wrong in allowing the killing of his sixty-nine brothers just to gain family power. He uses the trees to show that they had a different purpose rather than being rulers and now, because of what they have done, have a very poor excuse for a King (Abimelech is likened to a thorn bush instead of a towering, strong tree). Jotham tells the story, interprets the story, and then runs for his life. Eventually, as Jotham has predicted in his story, God makes Abimelech's supporters

turn on him. Here God uses the story of trees to show Abimelech's supporters that they have done the wrong thing. The story impacts them in a way that the cold hard truth might not. With a story, emotions are redirected; identification with certain characters is made; seemingly unrelated judgments are rendered. And at this point, one is more open to hearing how their life is connected with the story they have just heard. God uses stories to make his point, to predict outcomes, and to set truth firmly within our grasp. The stories become effective as the Holy Spirit chooses to work with them in our hearts.

### **King Ahab and the Smitten Prophet**

King Ahab was ordered by God to prevail against the army of Ben-Hadad (1 Kings 20). But when Ben-Hadad and his men show up seemingly repentant (after waging and losing a war against God and Israel), King Ahab makes a covenant with Ben-Hadad and sends him home, rather than dealing with him as God desired. God then sends a prophet to deal with King Ahab. The prophet stands beside the road with what is basically self-inflicted wounds waiting for the King. When the King shows up, he tells him a story, "Your servant was in the thick of the battle when a man showed up..." In the story, the servant has lost a prisoner that he was entrusted with and the King agrees that the proper punishment is death for the servant. The prophet then interprets the story for the king saying that by sending Ben-Hadad home, he and the people of Israel also deserve death. God uses this story to help King Ahab see himself in a way that he was unable to see directly. But he hears the story, judges the characters, and is then forced by the prophet to identify with the character he has just judged.

Other examples of God using stories to initiate change in his people in the Old Testament are contained in Numbers 23:18-24 (Moabites and the Israelites' unique

oracle), Judges 14:10-20 (Samson's marriage feast riddle), Isaiah 5:1-6 (Vineyard yielding wild grapes), Ezekiel 14:2-9 (Lion's whelps), Ezekiel 24:3-5 (The boiling pot), Ezekiel 17:3-10 (The great eagles and the wine). The Hebrews had a wealth of stories that they told and retold. God created us and therefore knows the effect that stories can have on our lives to change us. He has used storytellers throughout the Old Testament to present his messages – often convicting us of wrong doing and initiating transformation within us. Sometimes he used stories to set lives on a different course and give instructions to those willing to hear.

### New Testament Storytellers

Although he is not the only storyteller in the New Testament, Jesus is the primary one. He told roughly 30 parables in the New Testament representing about a third of all of his recorded teachings. Jesus' parables are memorable, graphic illustrations of his teachings that bridge the physical and spiritual world. They give witness to unseen things.

### **Jesus as Storyteller**

William Barclay states that the parables of Jesus use familiar examples to lead men's minds towards heavenly concepts - an "inward affinity between the natural and spiritual orders" (Barclay, 1999, 8-11). Jesus tells these stories to point the hearer towards the Father and in doing so initiates a transformation in the hearer.

In Matthew 13:10-17 and 23:34-35, the disciples ask Jesus directly, "Why do you speak in parables?" He answers that it is to "proclaim what has been hidden from the foundation of the world." His stories bridge the unseen and seen. But he also clarifies

that his parables only reveal the truths of God to those who will understand. They also serve to keep his truths hidden from those who will not understand. In Mark 4:33-34, Mark records that it is “with many such parables he spoke the Word to them, as they were able to hear it; he did not speak to them except in parables, but he explained everything in private to his disciples.” Jesus uses these stories about every day ordinary things to speak the Word of God to us. The phrase “as they were able to hear it” indicates that parables gave him a way to speak the truth in ways they were not only able hear, but also in ways that would be memorable. And apparently the disciples also received some private tutoring in interpreting the parables that the crowds did not receive.

Ashton Oxenden, the Bishop of Montreal, wrote in 1864 in his book, *The Parables of our Lord explained*, that parables were “a mode of teaching, which our blessed Lord seemed to take special delight in employing. And we may be quite sure, that because he knew what was in man better than we know, he would not have taught by Parables, if he had not felt that this was the kind of teaching best suited to our wants” (Oxenden 1864, 6). If God has chosen to relate to us through parables, can we not learn from this and relate to those in our care through these parables too?

### **Parable of the Sower**

One of Jesus’ parables in particular, the Parable of the Sower, demonstrates how Jesus uses parables to initiate transformation in those listening. First he tells the parable to the crowd around him:

Listen! A sower went out to sow. And as he sowed, some seeds fell on the path, and the birds came and ate them up. Other seeds fell on rocky ground, where they did not have much soil, and they sprang up quickly, since they had no depth of soil. But when the sun rose, they were scorched; and since they had no root, they withered away. Other seeds fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and

choked them. Other seeds fell on good soil and brought forth grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. Let anyone with ears listen! (Matthew 13:3-9)

Jesus tells of four cases of seed and soil. Some seed grows, some dies. One might come up with a variety of interpretations that might be given for this parable. Do the sower, seed, and soil represent types of people? Does the soil represent situations or people's hearts? Jesus tells this parable and lets it sink in. Then later he interprets the parable for his disciples:

Listen then to what the parable of the sower means: When anyone hears the message about the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart. This is the seed sown along the path. The one who received the seed that fell on rocky places is the man who hears the word and at once receives it with joy. But since he has no root, he lasts only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, he quickly falls away. The one who received the seed that fell among the thorns is the man who hears the word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke it, making it unfruitful. But the one who received the seed that fell on good soil is the man who hears the word and understands it. He produces a crop, yielding a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown. (Matthew 13:18-23)

Hearers of this parable have been inspired by Jesus throughout the centuries in different ways. Some have related to the seed, inspiring them to seek out good soil to grow in. Others have identified with the sower, inspiring them to look for or perhaps create good soil for seeds to be planted. Sowers have been comforted in the fact that they cannot expect all the seeds they sow to grow. Some see the sower as God alone – and our work as evangelists as those who prepare the soil. God may work in many ways in these parables – giving us identity with different aspects of the story at different times to bring about his purposes. Jesus used parables – narrative stories – to initiate transformation in



the lives of those who hear them by conveying spiritual truths through everyday stories and concepts.

### **Peter as Storyteller**

Jesus is not the only one who teaches through stories in the New Testament. At Pentecost, Peter retells the story of King David and connects it to the story of Jesus (Acts 2) so that the Jews may see their connection to Christ through their genetic relationship with David. Later in the temple (Acts 3) Peter retells the stories of Samuel, the prophets, and Abraham. Again, he wants the hearer to see that the “promises of God through his prophets are for them” (Acts 3:25) and so seeing, their hearts will be transformed for Christ. Peter knows that cold hard theology will not convict and inform the way these stories will invoke emotion and transformation.

### **Paul as Storyteller**

Like Peter, Paul often retells and interprets the stories of the Old Testament in order to transform the hearts of the hearers. In Romans 4, Paul reminds the early church of the stories of Abraham and David to illustrate that it is through faith that God puts us right with him. In Romans 5, he retells the story of Adam to speak of how sin and death came through one man, but how one man, Jesus, sets us free. Steve Moyise, in his book, *The Old Testament in the New*, points out that Paul uses the story of Adam again in 1 Tim 2:12-15, but in a different way this time (Moyise 2001, 94). This time the story is used to justify women being silent in this particular church. This demonstrates that one story may have many different applications for individual hearers on different occasions.

In Galatians 4, Paul retells the story of Hagar and Sarah to call the Galatians out of Pharisee-ism and into a life lived in the Spirit. He hopes they will connect with Sarah rather than Hagar and begin to follow the Spirit rather than the Law. In 2 Corinthians 3, Paul retells the story of Moses, who after talking to God had to put a veil over his face to hide the glory that shown from his face. Paul compares this to the veil that presently hides the truth from the Jews who have refused Christ. Paul retells the stories of the Old Testament to transform the hearts of the hearers. He recognizes that the stories have multiple meanings and sometimes reuses them to tell a different aspect of theology relevant to the particular people hearing the story.

#### The Claim of Scripture upon the Hearer

How does retelling the stories of the Bible work to transform the hearts of those who hear them? Why not just use any story with a good moral?

In my faith tradition, the Presbyterian Church (USA), confesses “the Scriptures to be the Word of God written, witnessing to God's self-revelation. Where that Word is read and proclaimed, Jesus Christ the Living Word is present by the inward witness of the Holy Spirit. For this reason the reading, hearing, preaching, and confessing of the Word are central to Christian worship” (PCUSA Book of Order 2009, W-2.2001). In addition, ordained leaders in the PC(USA) are required to affirm that “... the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments...[are]...., by the Holy Spirit, the unique and authoritative witness to Jesus Christ in the Church universal, and God's Word to [them]” (PCUSA Book of Order 2009, G-14.0405b.2).

In other words, the scriptures are not simply a set of nice stories, but when we retell the stories of the Bible, whether they be historical or parable, Jesus, who is the

word (John 1:1) is presented and revealed by the witness of the Holy Spirit. While secular stories with a good moral antidote may be transformative (they may even be the method the Holy Spirit chooses to use on certain occasions to transform an individual), they do not, however, carry the promise that Romans 10:17 makes: “Faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes through the word of Christ.” Scripture carries the promise that from the retelling of the word of Christ, our faith grows. And growing faith transforms us.

Alternatively, secular stories – even ones with good morals – may or may not be truth. For instance, the story of The Fox and The Leopard, one of Aesop’s fables, may or may not contain spiritual truth. The Fox argues with the Leopard over who is more beautiful. While the Leopard is pointing out his beautiful spots, the Fox interrupts, “No, I am the more beautiful, because my beauty is of the mind” (Ash 1990, 92). The Fox is certainly not short on ego. And it is highly debatable as to whether one’s mind can be that beautiful when you are that enchanted with yourself. However, we can be assured that all the stories of the Bible are reliable and contain real, not manufactured spiritual truths. In John 17:17, Jesus prays, “Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth.” In 2 Timothy 3:14-17, it is written that “From childhood you have known the sacred writings that are able to instruct you for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, so that everyone who belongs to God may be proficient, equipped for every good work.” The retelling of scripture has a supernatural affect on the hearer.

We can be certain that retelling the stories of the Bible will not mislead or return void. They reveal Christ to the hearer. And when the Holy Spirit sees fit to work, the

seeds the stories of the Bible plant will germinate. As the prophet Isaiah testified, “For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return there until they have watered the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and succeed in the thing for which I sent it” (Isaiah 55:10-11). For this reason, I believe those giving pastoral care to others, can and should use the stories of the Bible to initiate transformation in the hearer.

### Conclusion

God has intentionally chosen to use storytelling throughout human history to accomplish spiritual transformation in the hearer. From this observation Christian care givers must take more seriously the task of telling and applying the stories of the Bible to those in their care. There is firm evidence of a biblical foundation for using Biblical narratives in pastoral care to initiate spiritual transformation.

# CHAPTER 3

## A LITERARY REVIEW OF THE USE OF BIBLICAL STORYTELLING IN PASTORAL CARE

### What is Known

To my great surprise, there has been almost nothing written on using biblical narratives in pastoral care to initiate spiritual transformation, but there are many books and articles which dance close to its border and which I have found to be very helpful. For instance, I stumbled across a dissertation by Dennis Justin Jarvis on “The Use of Parable as a Religious Resource for Pastoral Counseling.” While the title would suggest that he limits his topic to parables (rather than including all kinds of narrative Bible stories, as I will do), in reality, he really limits his thesis to just one parable, the Parable of the Prodigal Son. Then he extends the results he finds to all parables. In looking at the Parable of the Prodigal Son, he examines how retelling this particular parable can help those in his care who are undergoing a variety of different personal concerns. In his clinical practice, he tells the story of the prodigal son, watches for reactions and records them. One person sees the proverb as a statement that they should reconcile with their parents. Another person sees it as an invitation to look closer at their relationships with their siblings. I think this multifaceted effect that he notices in care-receiver’s reactions to the parable makes a good point: different people, according to their life circumstances, will relate to the biblical stories at different points of intersection. The biblical storyteller should be aware of this and allow for it. If the biblical storyteller is true to the story, then

the Holy Spirit can work in the hearts of the care-receiver in ways that the biblical storyteller might never have anticipated.

Another difference between my topic and Jarvis' work is that he, being in clinical practice, focused on the use of the parable in a formal clinical pastoral counseling setting. I am going to focus on informal person-to-person pastoral care. Nevertheless, there is much to learn from Jarvis' work. He understands parables to be a type of transitional phenomena best described by using the following image. We are all familiar with the way a child uses transitional objects (a doll, a stuffed animal, or blanket) to ease anxiety, create an identity, or develop a capacity to relate to others. The child does not directly face his or her anxiety, but uses these transitional objects to ease their way into a new reality in their life. In the same way, a pastoral care giver can use the retelling of parables as transitional objects to mediate between the parable and the new reality. This mediation provides a less unsettling experience than if the pastoral care giver forced the care-receiver to directly face their issue. This allows the pastoral care giver to initiate transformation rather than force it. The parable serves to both unsettle (so that the care-receiver's thoughts can be stimulated) and to allow the care-receiver to envision a new reality revealed by God's word. Hence transformation is initiated. In his clinical trials, he observed positive results from each retelling of the parable of the prodigal son. Each individual identified with at least one of the characters in the story and grew closer in their understanding and relationship with God. He had carefully chosen the individuals whom he felt would benefit from the prodigal son story.

In further explanation that can be applied to biblical storytelling, John Patton, in his contribution to *The Dictionary of Pastoral Care and Counseling*, points out the

importance of the use of symbolic types of communication as a vehicle for a hermeneutic shift in the counselee's interpretation of self, relationship, and values. Patton believes that human beings understand themselves and the meaning of their lives mainly through stories. And that if they can identify with a character in a sacred story, the story is able to provide a larger interpretive framework for understanding themselves and their situation in the light of God (Patton 1990, 138). For instance, after King David heard the story that the prophet Nathan told him regarding a pet lamb (2 Sam 12), King David no longer saw himself as sovereign hero, but as an adulterer (perhaps even a rapist) and murderer. The story helped him reinterpret himself, his relationship to others, and his values. It is possible that we often interpret our lives in ways that are not correct – but by allowing the stories of the Bible to intersect our lives, the Holy Spirit is able to give us proper interpretations which can allow us to experience a closer walk with God.

In another book, *Retelling the Biblical Story*, closely related to my topic, Stephen Shoemaker focuses on helping pastors preach in a narrative style. While preaching is the focus, rather than person to person pastoral care, his chapter on “The Theology of Narrative Preaching” provides an excellent theological framework for anyone offering care using the narratives of the Bible (Shoemaker 1985, 90). I wholeheartedly share his belief that all of the biblical stories are Christ-centric; in that they point to the coming Messiah detailing the journey of God's people toward reconciliation with God that only the Messiah can provide. And that we should never lose sight of that in helping our care-receivers interpret the stories. He also puts together a collection of fourteen biblical stories and their possible use in preaching. Likewise, James Limburg puts together a collection of six biblical stories and their possible application to modern times. I believe

that these two collections can be a starting point for me in suggesting particular biblical stories for use in pastoral care.

In another very interesting approach to using storytelling in pastoral care, William Bausch, a catholic priest, provides me inspiration through using the story of Dorothy and the Wizard of Oz as a backdrop to address sixteen pastor care issues commonly encountered by pastors. While the focus of this thesis is using only biblical stories, his book gives me a vision for what is possible. He takes characters in the story of Oz and uses them to illustrate deep spiritual truths. His book not only fed my soul, but I could not help thinking how much stronger it would be to pull these truths from the biblical stories themselves.

William White points out in *Stories for the Journey* that storytelling/listening is a whole brain activity which fulfills the Mark 12:29-30 command to “Love the Lord your God... with your *entire* mind.” His lament is that the 20<sup>th</sup> century church is stuck in the left brain. The left brain is the center for logic and analysis, whereas, the right brain originates imagination and feelings (White 1988, 8). This is certainly true of my own denomination, the PCUSA. We have gotten away from studying scripture, worshipping God, and interacting with each other in ways that are not left brain. Although right brain activity, the use of art in worship, the use of the imagination in teaching, is coming back, we often only allow it in children’s services and vacation Bible school. Anything more might make the “frozen chosen” very uncomfortable. But White says that using the whole mind is more than a matter of taste or preference. Faith is not simply a rational response – it involves both trust and rational assent. To fully experience God, we need to experience God in both hemispheres of our brain. I do agree, especially when I recognize



that Jesus did not primarily choose to lecture on theology (which would have focused primarily on logic and analysis), but instead chose to call humanity to him by using the right brain stimulating the imagination through stories and parables. I want this dissertation to result in teaching care givers how to engage both the right and left brain of those needing pastoral care.

In addition, Annette Simmons does a wonderful job explaining why storytelling does what stating the facts cannot do: "People don't want more information. They are up to their eyeballs in information. They want faith.... It is faith that moves mountains, not facts.... Story is your path to creating faith (3)." In her section called "Programming Minds with Story," she points out that the care giver mostly likely won't be around when the care-receiver needs to make a decision or choose the correct behaviors, but that a vivid story goes with them replaying again and again. Although Simmons does not point this out, her comments raise a concern that I want to pay attention to - and that is that the story needs to be vivid. So my handbook needs to give some bit of instruction on how to make a story vivid rather than just passing along dry facts.

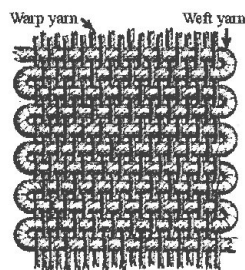
One of the things that I have struggled with in my own pastoral care storytelling ministry is how to initiate the story so that it does not seem out of place to the hearer. "I want to tell you a story that relates to your situation" sometimes sounds unexpected and pushy to a care-receiver. Simmons, an activist who uses storytelling to educate, teaches her readers the technique of "dropping a seemingly nonsensical statement relating the person's situation to the story" (Simmons 2002, 78) into a conversation. Her goal is to elicit a question from the hearer. Perhaps she might say with excitement, "That person you just described reminds me of a seed trying to sprout on top of a rock." Then when

the hearer asks, “What do you mean by that?” The storyteller has then been invited to tell their story. The goal, of course, is to get an invitation from the hearer to then tell the story. She has more invaluable tips (language, gestures, facial expressions, etc.) on how to tell stories that will be a helpful starting point in my work. She also gives invaluable advice over several chapters about how transformation takes time, especially in the “unwilling, unconcerned, and unmotivated.” Hearts may not change all at once. This is certainly something to keep in mind. We know this is also true of how God’s power sometimes works too. Remember the story of the blind man whose sight Jesus gave back in parts instead of all at once? It is important to expect in pastoral care that the Holy Spirit works in different ways at different speeds. And if we remember this, we might decide to keep ministering instead of giving up when it doesn’t seem to be working. Although it is a secular book, Simmons’ book is absolutely the best work I have seen on the subject of storytelling with the purpose of transforming people’s mindsets.

Ed Brody’s *Spinning Tales, Weaving Hope* is mostly a collection of stories dedicated to the peace and justice movement, but it has an excellent section in the beginning that teaches the very basics of how to tell a story. Even more invaluable is the section on post-story activities. I am a firm believer in pastoral care follow up. Before entering seminary, I had gone to our minister to talk about the possibility that God might be leading me to go into seminary. She listened, talked, and prayed with me. But before I left, she said, “What are your actions items?” I was a little shocked, but this was very helpful to me, because I left with a plan and a promise that she would be checking in on me – that she was still involved in my journey. Brody’s book demonstrates why post-story pastoral involvement is so important when using story telling as a tool to transform.

It says that story telling plants a seed, but the seed is more likely to grow and blossom if it is cared for. The book wants the storyteller to see that with a little extra time, a story which brings deep emotions to the surface can become a springboard toward deeper insight and understanding. So he suggests that with each story you tell, to design “homework,” an activity, for the listener to pursue after the story is over. Each of the stories in his book has follow up activities for different age groups. For instance, the story of the gardener, our Father, who tends to the branches so they produce fruit, might include planting a seed and watching the seed germinate and grow in order to meditate further on the care our heavenly Father gives us. The opportunity for creativity is endless. But the activities are designed both to reconnect the care giver and receiver, as well as, keeping the story fresh. The book has a section on how to decide on age and situation-appropriate follow up activities. Other homework activities might include encouraging the care receiver to incorporate certain spiritual disciplines into their lives such as *lectio divina*, prayer of *examen*, contemplation, fasting, or labyrinth meditation. Two excellent books that discuss spiritual disciplines designed to open the heart and mind to God are *Sleeping with Bread: Holding What Gives You Life* by Dennis Linn and *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook: Practices That Transform Us* by Adele Ahlberg Calhoun.

Peter Morgan describes story telling as fabric making. It is the church’s activity to weave the fabric using the stories of the Bible as the “warp” or background yarn, and the stories of our lives as the “weft” or filler yarn. The “weft” is then woven into the “warp.” In other words, it is the church’s job to take the stories of the Bible (the warp) and weave into them our own stories (the weft).



**Figure 1 Plain Weaving (Gibson 2008, 8).**

Morgan believes that it is through this weaving of the bible and personal stories that churches stay vital and relevant to the culture. It is Morgan's concern that mainline denominations have lost this art and become more focused on theology or fellowship than story. This focus has made them irrelevant to not only the outside world, but to members, as well. But he has hope that congregations can be revitalized through the restoration of storytelling. He reminds us that the Bible is not a document of systematic theology, but the story of a creator in love with his creation. The community of God should be a community of storytellers weaving their own stories into God's story. He believes that main line congregations need to shift from fellowship-based (*koinonia*) congregations to story-based (*kerygma*) congregations. These *kerygma* congregations are ones that can listen to the stories of those around them and then weave them into the biblical stories in a way relevant for both theirs and other's lives. And as expert weavers, we initiate transformation both in our own lives and lives of others. His book offers invaluable suggestions for meditations, retreats, and activities for churches and individuals to do in order to learn to weave again. He shows how to use biblical storytelling to revitalize prayer, enliven worship (rituals), preaching, learning, fellowship, witness, and service. But he does not address person-to-person pastoral care, although I

would argue that all of this is pastoral care in a sense. And I am happy to have found this book so that I might extend its work into the area of pastoral care.

*Telling Stories that Touch the Heart* is an excellent teaching resource of how to tell a story in a way that it will address the audience's needs and initiate transformation. His first piece of advice is to only tell stories that have touched you. It is interesting that these are the same sort of words my theology professor used when he said to only preach on scripture that has touched you personally. The book suggests a simple, but effective way that anyone (the educated exegete or untrained laity) can do the exegetical background work on the biblical story using the questions "who, what, when, where, why, and how." Doing the background work makes for a more colorful and honest retelling of the story.

### Using Storytelling in Special Pastoral Care Situations

#### **The Bereaved**

Edwin Mark Cooley's, *The Use of Narrative in the Pastoral Care of Bereaved Individuals and Families*, focuses his interest in narrative story telling in the care of those who are bereaved. Most of his dissertation surrounds getting the family to share their narrative of the deceased person's life. But in chapter two, he educates the pastoral care giver of the primary biblical stories of death and bereavement, encouraging them to use these to help encourage families to discover their own beliefs about the afterlife (Cooley 1993, 15). The potential in this section is for pastors to have concrete stories to use during pastoral care situations involving death, but he does not clearly define the stories, nor does he suggest a methodology for their usage. However, he confirms that telling biblical stories to bereaved families is important because it helps the bereaved relate their

grief to the gospel which allows them to encounter God and initiate spiritual transformation and power over grief.

## **Women**

Likewise, as Christine Neuger examines a narrative approach to counseling women in her book, *Counseling Women: A Narrative Approach*, she is primarily focusing on getting women to tell their own stories. However, in Chapter Five, she explores what she calls “counterstories.” These are stories that enable the woman to rely on a character’s experience as she finds her own strength in overcoming the victimization to which all women in our broken world are subjected. Neuger goes on to relate these stories to the parables that Jesus told. By retelling both the biblical parables (and, in her opinion, other moral stories modeled after biblical parables), the woman is enabled by identifying with the parables to seek new directions for her life. Although I will only look at biblical stories, she states something that I find very important not only in dealing with women in pastoral care situations, but in all pastoral care situations: she cautions the pastoral counselor not to interpret the counterstory with biased paternal/cultural views, but to allow the story to be told without bias so that the woman can interpret it in its most pure sense. The woman must be trusted with the story and the power of the Holy Spirit to interpret it for her.

## **African-Americans**

Drawing on his biblically rich African-American roots, Edward Wimberly, has developed a biblical story (not story *telling*) methodology for pastoral counseling. He helps the care-receiver remember favorite biblical stories that may have had a formative

influence upon their spiritual development. Then he works with the care-receiver to choose from these a biblical story that the care-receiver could use to work toward future spiritual development. Spiritual transformation is then initiated through the process of identification by the care-receiver with the characters in the biblical story. In other words, the care-receiver's spiritual growth is facilitated through a process of re-authoring their self-understanding into the biblical story. He believes that this method is especially helpful in the African American community where biblical storytelling has a significant history in the upbringing of children, making the use of it in pastoral counseling an easy extension of parental nurturing.

## **Children**

David Epston is not interested in biblical stories or pastoral care, but does something very interesting in offering therapy to his young clients (although he claims this method works equally well with adults). He provides his client with a tape of a story that he hopes will motivate them to overcoming their particular problem. He claims that in doing so, it allows the children to employ the stories at times when they are needed most – perhaps, at night before bedtime. I think providing a recorded tape to certain care-receivers might be very helpful, but would rather see one-on-one contact by teaching parents or friends to tell the story when the pastor is not available. I believe a community approach rather than a technology approach is much more holistic. However, even more importantly, he points out that stories allow children to generate their own solutions to problems rather than having adults provide the solution. He says children should be trusted to develop their own interpretations of the stories and encouraged to find their own solutions. I think this is even more powerful when using scripture and employing

the theology that the Holy Spirit interprets scripture for the individual needing the interpretation.

## **Alcoholics**

*The Spirituality of Imperfection* by Earnest Kurtz and Katherine Ketchum provides a basis for using storytelling to aid alcoholics in developing a healthy spirituality. Spirituality is not defined in a Christian sense, but as a road to wholeness no matter what one's religion might be. Of course, I would argue that there is no wholeness outside of Christ, but there are still interesting lessons to be learned from this book. Some of the important lessons that are taught in Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) are that its members do not have to have all the answers to be on the pathway to recovery, nor do they have to have a clear pathway to follow. I think this kind of "imperfection" (which is clearly not "sin" – even in a Christian sense of sin), is important to note. It pertains to the Christian journey too in the sense that we do not have all the answers (although we know Christ does have all the answers) and we do not have a clear pathway (although we know Jesus is the way himself). We often move forward one step at a time trusting Jesus knows the details of the journey when we do not. They call this sort of acknowledgement "the way of imperfection." In other words, we do not have to have everything figured out to move toward spiritual wholeness. Nor do we have to have everything in our biblical stories figured out to tell them. Nor do we have to have experienced everything in our stories to tell them. This book claims that since stories serve to give the listener guidance without having all the answers and without giving a clear map, they encourage the listener to listen to a bigger power than themselves for guidance. The stories of the Bible are particularly this way with multiple facets of



meaning as the Holy Spirit guides and interprets them for the listener. The stories give us experience – a sense of touching and feeling – that we otherwise would not have access to. So instead of giving the alcoholic a set of rules to live by, they give them stories to interpret and in this way believe that the alcoholic is developing a spirituality with which a set of rules cannot compete. The book follows its explanation of the need for storytelling with more than 100 stories that guide the alcoholic through forgiveness, tolerance, love, etc. Although this is a somewhat different approach to what I wish to do in my work, I think this book is an excellent approach for spiritual transformation. I long to rewrite the book so that it is Christ-centric. It can only lead the reader so far toward wholeness without calling out Jesus' name.

#### What Is Not Known

Although Jarvis did clinical research on the use of parables in pastoral counseling, he did not clinically evaluate the use of other biblical narratives. He does have a section in his dissertation that projects his findings into all biblical narratives (Jarvis 2003, 40). He believes that the same elements exist in all biblical narratives that exist in parables and therefore care-receivers will derive transformative spiritual benefits from all biblical stories. However, because I trust what the Bible says about itself ("All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, so that everyone who belongs to God may be proficient, equipped for every good work," 2 Timothy 3:16-17) and will be developing my guidebook for those who share similar beliefs, I do not think formal clinical evaluation as that done by Jarvis is necessary for my work.

### Major Questions the Literature Has Raised

Both Neuger and Epstein cautioned the care giver to always refrain from interpreting the stories for the care-receiver in order that the care-receiver could have space to find their own voice in the stories. Kurtz and Ketchum agree saying that, "Some answers we can only 'find': they are never 'given'." While I do agree that allowing the Holy Spirit to do its interpretive work unfettered by the care giver's personal biases is of undeniable importance, I also want to explore if there comes a time when the pastoral care giver is called upon to provide some level of interpretation for the care-receiver. It appears to me that there are times when the care-receiver may need help should they interpret the story in a way that does not have theological truth or, as Wimberly might say, in a way that is not Christ-centric. I believe the pastoral care role is different from the role of psychiatrist or psychologist. We are dedicated to speaking the truth, offering hope, and demonstrating the love of Jesus. So it is important that we do offer guidance when a care-receiver misses the path of truth, hope, and love. I want to explore when it is appropriate to give the care-receiver space to discover God's truths on their own and when it is appropriate to offer interpretations.

Simmons also offers some food for thought that is closely related and something I want to explore further. She says that a well-told story will help influence the care-receiver's interpretation of the facts. Specifically, she believes that a well-told story delivers context to the listener that will allow facts to slide into new slots in the listener's brain. She disputes that facts speak for themselves, but that facts only have meaning when you give the listener a story that interprets the facts for them. In other words, the story itself interprets a set of facts the listener already has. So how does this influence

if/when/how a pastor interprets the story for a care-receiver? Perhaps a care-receiver misinterprets the story, because he or she has a set of pre-story facts that were wrong. How does the pastor address this? Simmons discusses this in “Physiological baby steps for changing people’s minds.” She looks at the facts the hearer already believes as a ladder. And if the facts are wrong, you have to coach them off the ladder, one rung at a time. Instead of hitting them with the story you really want to tell them, you may have to start with stories that dismantle their misinformation first. Simmons is a secular psychologist, but I think she is onto something. I want to put more thought into this for biblical storytellers. For instance, if a person’s theology about servanthood is wrong, then the story of the woman anointing Jesus’ feet with expensive perfume might be wasted until the issue of servanthood can be addressed. How does a pastor know where to start?

On the other side of this coin, perhaps the story was not told well and that led to a misinterpretation. How does the pastor tell the biblical story without memorizing it word for word? Or without reading it directly from the scripture? How do they avoid taking a story to a hermeneutically-biased place where it doesn’t really belong? These are questions I want to consider further.

### Errors to Be Avoided

Neuger does not limit her “counterstories” (stories of hope that counter our personal experiences and initiate transformation) to biblical stories. In her opinion, transformative stories can also be moral stories told to the woman with the goal of helping her rise above the issues that society has placed upon her. I do disagree with her on this note somewhat. While I think the Holy Spirit can work any way the Holy Spirit

wishes, I do not believe that any moral story has the promise of being just as effective as those recorded in scripture ("Faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes through the word of Christ," Romans 10:17). Shoemaker makes the point that to hear the stories of the Bible is to enter them and experience the birth of faith; it is to have your own salvation story. A moral story does not have the same promise of the power of transformation that scripture has. So I will limit my work to biblical stories only.

### Summary

I found surprising little in my literature review that directly addressed the possibilities of teaching pastors and lay leaders how to use biblical storytelling to initiate spiritual transformation in person-to-person pastoral care giving. This astonishes me. Biblical storytelling predates the written scriptures. Even in the scriptures itself, we see many occasions where prophets or even Jesus himself, used stories and parables to minister to those they encountered. And yet, Christians seem to have lost this art. Perhaps having the written word, we feel it is easier (or more accurate) for someone to just read the scripture than to hear it told. Perhaps we believe that biblical stories are only sacred if read word for word, and we are afraid to retell the stories in our own words for fear of mis-telling them. But in departing from an ancient storytelling tradition, we have lost the community and family bonding that hearing and telling the stories again and again brings.

Preachers still tell the biblical narrative stories in sermons, but are not taught how to use them in a person-to-person ministry context. Perhaps our religious culture has become so impressed with our own left brain logic and analysis abilities (deluding ourselves into believing we've got answers for all the great theological questions) that we

no longer think we need to hear the theological truths God might be communicating to our right brain. The right brain has become a mystical place that we fear instead of use in our relationship with God. We have forgotten Jesus chose to communicate through stories. In seminary, I had a class with the Presbyterian theologian, Shirley Guthrie who had studied under Karl Barth. One of the things that was remarkable to Guthrie about Karl Barth was that Barth was adamant that the only correct place to “do theology” was within the church community. Shirley Guthrie had expected Barth to say the work of theology belonged to important theologians isolated in their ivory towers. But instead, Barth believed that not only does the Holy Spirit work in community, but in the life of the church community is where theory and practice intersected. Story telling in community has this same effect. It initiates a dialogue that intersects theory and practice – stories not specifically our own, become our own as they intersect with our experiences.

However, many secular groups and organizations seem to be way ahead of us in this area. The Peace and Justice Movement have found storytelling is a particularly powerful way to change people’s hearts and minds making them sympathetic to those they previously did not understand. Alcoholics Anonymous and Bereavement groups see the healing aspects of storytelling. Psychologists working with children and women have found the healing benefits, as well. As Christians we can discover the transforming power for change that is used effectively in many social science fields.

## CHAPTER 4

### DESIGN OF THE PASTORAL CARE STORYTELLING GUIDEBOOK

This guidebook is written to teach pastors and lay leaders alike how to incorporate biblical stories into their pastoral care giving. By learning to tell the stories of the Bible to those in spiritual need, the pastor is free to bear witness to the gospel stories while allowing God to speak directly to the care-receiver without undue interpretation of the message by the care giver. It also allows the care giver to journey alongside the care-receiver meeting them where they are spiritually rather than beginning with a cold theological discussion.

At his inaugural address on April 13, 2010, Dr. Steve Hayner, the soon-to-be president of Columbia Theological Seminary, told the story of an experience he had while traveling for World Vision in Africa (Columbia Theological Seminary Website 2010, 12:50). He watched as parents carried their starving children into the World Vision camp. In a situation like this, a novice aid worker's first reaction is to run immediately for food and begin to feed the child. But the body of a child who is in the throes of starvation has begun to shut down. It can no longer readily accept solid food. The body no longer knows what to do with it. So the first thing an experienced aid worker does is to place sugar water on the child's thumb and pray the child has enough energy to suck on it. Dr. Hayner watched and waited while the little bit of sugar water began to stimulate the child's digestive system. The aid workers explained that if and when the child began to cry for more sugar water, it would be a sign that the body had begun to

crave nourishment again. After increasing doses of sugar water, then the child would be ready to begin a gradual diet of solid food.

Such is the situation with many of our congregants. They are in the throes of spiritual starvation. They can't handle a feast of theological information. They need sugar water first. Telling a biblical story provides the initial sugar water. And as those in spiritual starvation cry out for more, surprisingly, the retelling of the same biblical story can provide stronger nourishment as the congregant begins to take it in deeper. Biblical storytelling puts the care-receiver in a position to delve deeper and deeper into the truths of our faith, as well as, for more complicated and deeper theological truths conveyed through both stories and more traditional pastoral care and education.

### A Storytelling Methodology for the Pastoral Care Giver

#### **What Not To Do**

Starting a guidebook with negative thoughts on “What *Not* To Do” might seem de-motivational. But, on the other hand, if the biblical storyteller knows what to avoid, then what remains to be learned becomes enjoyable. So take time to first learn what not to do.

First of all, don't feel that you need to memorize the story. Memorizing the story is fine if you have time and enjoy doing that sort of thing, but it isn't required and can bog you down and limit your repertoire of stories to tell in different situations. So don't be a perfectionist in this regard. The biblical stories were told and retold before they were ever written down. The Holy Spirit was active in the retellings even though the early Christian storytellers did not worry about getting every word exactly the same every

time the story was told. And the hearer will not expect you to have it memorized. The hearer will give you a significant amount of flexibility in the telling of the story. And they will expect that you will tell it differently for different audiences and contexts. Relax any perfectionist tendencies you have and ask the Holy Spirit to illuminate your retelling.

You might wonder if reading the stories, rather than retelling the stories, to the care-receiver would suffice. It isn't preferable simply because much is lost in the bonding experience with the care-receiver. You won't have direct eye contact. You won't be able to reach out and touch their hand or motion with gestures that will captivate them. But, if you are nervous or unsure whether you can do a particular story justice, then reading the story is better than not sharing the story at all. But in reading the story you will lose many of the elements that make storytelling such a powerful tool.

For those who have taken a preaching class, many of us are taught the Dr. Haddon Robinson (Harold John Ockenga Distinguished Professor of Preaching at Gordon-Conwell) method of preaching in which there is one "Big Idea" behind each section of scripture. Using this method, preachers are taught to discover the big idea for each text through exegetical work and then focus their sermons on the "Big Idea." While this is an excellent preaching method, storytelling is different from discovering a big idea and then disclosing it to the listener. Storytelling is not preaching a sermon. There will be many applications of the story as people identify with different characters in the story. Different people will see different things in the story and identify with different characters as they apply the stories to their lives. Do not boil your story down to a big



idea to teach the care-receiver. Let the care-receiver discover what God is saying to them through the story.

Do not initiate a story when there are distractions around the care-receiver that require their attention. For instance, don't begin a story when you sense that the care-receiver will not be able to truly hear the story. This sometimes happens when a care-receiver is in shock over a recent diagnosis or has received bad news. They will need to adjust before a story is appropriate. At other times, the care-receiver will need to talk rather than listen. If the care-receiver needs to talk, let them talk – thereby de-cluttering their mind so that they can listen to the story later. Don't start a story when you suspect that you will be interrupted. Generally, the storyteller should wait until the care-receiver can achieve a contemplative mood without overwhelming anxiety before beginning a story. The one exception I have found is when an anxious care-receiver wants a distraction. Perhaps you are waiting with them for a loved one's surgery to complete. Even though there is anxiety present, a story told in a quiet area of a waiting room may be exactly what is needed.

Also be aware of your own motivation to tell a story. If you cannot tell the story out of great love for the person in your care, then pray for your own change of heart and wait. If you can't tell the story without feeling superior to the person you are telling it to, don't tell it. Telling a story to someone when your primary motivation is to express your personal anger, hurt, or to offer an ultimatum is passive aggressive behavior and is counterproductive. Wait to tell the story until God has filled your heart with love and correct motivations. One result of being aware of your motivations is the advantage of being less likely to bore your listeners. Your listeners will become bored if the story is

told for your benefit instead of theirs. So don't tell the story for your own therapy, to vent your own frustrations, or to stand on a soapbox.

Finally, be careful not to take a story to a hermeneutically-biased place. We each have a certain knowledge base that we use to interpret stories – and our lives. In preparing a story for telling, we will obviously use this knowledge database – it is the only one we have, after all. But in doing so, we need to take great caution in reading into a story things that are not there. For instance, if one's particular hermeneutical bias was to see women mostly as homemakers, one might hear the story of Mary and Martha and assume that because this is a story of two women that the truth in the story is limited to women's domestic issues (how to work together to prepare meals and entertain guests) instead of a larger eternal truth that is applicable to all of God's people. The best way to avoid a hermeneutical bias is to be as true to the text as possible and as self aware as possible. Try diligently not to put one's biases into the story.

### **What To Do**

Trust the story to make the point. In Fred Craddock's Audio CD series, "Preaching as Storytelling," he reminds the reader that in the past, it was thought that stories served two purposes: "one, to give the listeners a break from hard driving and often dull exhortations; and two, to illustrate, to clarify, a point abstract and difficult to comprehend." But he goes on to say that today we understand stories differently: "A story can be, not the illustration of the message, but the message itself." When a story is used in pastoral care, it is the message. Tell it, trust it, and get out of its way.

Be comfortable with unanswered questions in the stories. Don't feel compelled to fill in details that aren't there. Craddock gives us an example of how stories with

unanswered questions sometimes serve to make the story more – not less – applicable to our lives. He asks the audience to form an opinion of what is happening as he tells the following story: “Hopefully George will be released this weekend. Maggie can hardly wait. The old gang is planning the usual party at Charlie’s Place.” A lady who had a long term illness understands the story to mean that George has been hospitalized and Maggie is his loving wife. A man who struggles with alcoholism understands Charlie’s Place as a bar, whereas, a young husband is reminded of the days when his bachelor pad was the place of many parties. Another person might believe George is a convict and his old gang is a group of hoodlums. We often fill in details with our experiences. This helps us to relate to the story.

Be ready for messy interpretations of the story and don’t overreact by redirecting the care-receiver’s interpretation immediately. As the story is told, it will interpret a set of facts that the care-receiver already has about the world. If the care-receiver’s facts are faulty, they will not immediately receive the story as it was intended. Simmons discusses this in Chapter 4 of *The Story Factor: Inspiration, influence, and persuasion through the art of storytelling*. She describes the facts a care-receiver has as a ladder that the person has climbed (Simmons 2002, 83). If the person is tittering on a ladder of incorrect facts, their perception of stories can be influenced by these false facts. When you recognize that as a possibility, the person must be coached down off the ladder, one rung at a time. The story can be used to do that. For instance, if a care-receiver hearing “The Story of the Prodigal Son” interprets the father’s actions of forgiveness and love as God manipulating the two sons for his own unseemly gain, then some discussion will need to happen as to why the care-receiver interprets the story that way using the story to coach

them off the ladder to the floor. Perhaps they had a father figure in their life that was manipulative for his own interests. The care giver will have to help them dismantle their misinformation by seeing that their experience, while valid, doesn't mean God is like their father using them for his own gain. Once the care-receiver has backed off the ladder, then the story can help them rebuild a ladder with new facts and the impact of the story can now have a more expected effect on them. As the care giver, don't become discouraged should this happen. It is simply a teaching opportunity.

### **Learning the Story**

There are many different ways to learn the story so that it can be told to a care-receiver. Most methods, in my opinion, are more complicated than necessary. Keeping it simple will allow you to learn more stories and be a more effective care giver. Below is a method that I have developed for myself and found success in teaching others. The next paragraphs will walk through the process and are followed by an example. If this process does not work for you, then try one of the others found in such books as *The Art of Storytelling: Easy Steps to Presenting an Unforgettable Story* by John Walsh or *The Storytellers Startup Book* by Margaret Reed MacDonald. Experiment until you find a method that is not too time consuming, yet gets the job done and makes you confident. It can be very helpful to keep a storytelling journal where you record notes about each story for quick reference later. This will make repeated pastoral care situations easier. Sample pages of the Storytelling Journal, which can be copied and kept in a loose-leaf notebook, are included on page 47.

**Table 1 Storytelling Journal Template**

Storytelling Journal: *Name of Story*

**Scripture:** Print Text Here

**Outline** (No more than 5 points):

- 1) Name Scene 1
- 2) Name Scene 2
- 3) Name Scene 3
- 4) Name Scene 4
- 5)

**Mood Shifts:**

Initial Mood → Changing Mood → Changing Mood → Final Mood

**Highlight Phrases to Memorize** (Use the text you have printed out above to highlight phrases you want to memorize to include in your storytelling)

**Characters:** (Underline characters in the text above and then identify characters with someone you know)

Character 1 = Name / Name of Someone You Know

Character 2 = Name / Name of Someone You Know

Character 3 = Name / Name of Someone You Know

Character 4 = Name / Name of Someone You Know

**Feedback:** (Record feedback you get from practice runs)

### *Four Steps to Learning a Story:*

**Step 1:** Read the story several times until you feel comfortable with it. Usually 2-3 times is enough if you are reading it where you are able to concentrate. Print the text in the Storytelling Journal as indicated on page 47. If it is a very long story covering more than one chapter, I may not print it out. Instead I would just record phrases or verses that I want to memorize. An example of this can be seen on page 66.

**Step 2:** Do a simple outline of the story into no more than five points. Any more points than that will be too hard to remember. The fewer the better. For instance, the story of Noah might have the following five points: 1) Situation between God and Humans, 2) God's relationship with Noah, 3) Building and Gathering, 4) The Flood, and 5) The Aftermath. Use these points to progress through the story as you tell it. They can be used to jog your memory and help you divide the story into one scene at a time.

**Step 3:** Analyze the story.

What is the mood of the story? Does it change? How can you create these moods in the retelling? For instance, in the story of Peter walking on water, the mood changes from adventurous when Peter asks to join Jesus on the water to disappointing when Peter begins to sink. One might emphasize this change of mood by changing the tone and pace of one's voice. Or one might emphasize it with a change of body language... sitting on the edge of your chair to emphasize excitement, but leaning back into the chair with dropped shoulders to emphasize disappointment. Record the changing moods in the Storytelling Journal.

Notice any remarkable phrases or words in the text. Highlight them in the Storytelling Journal. Why are these phrases and words there? Can you use these in your

retelling of your story? For instance, in the story of Jesus asking Peter to take care of his church (John 21:15-17), Jesus asks Peter repeatedly to “tend” or “feed” his sheep. These are important phrases and can be used verbatim in the retelling of this story.

Identify each character in the story. Underline them in the Storytelling Journal. Look for characters that are assumed, but not mentioned. For instance, God might be a character in the story, but isn’t mentioned. The person telling the story might be a character in the story too. It often helps in retelling the story if you loosely match the personalities in the story to someone you already know. For instance, when I retell the story of Mary and Martha inviting Jesus into their home (Luke 10:38-42), I picture someone I am familiar with as Martha. In this case I picture Monica Geller, played by Courtney Cox on the television sitcom, *Friends*. Monica is always eager to organize and work, but is also quick to judge anyone who doesn’t follow her direction. Picturing a character in the story as a familiar person often helps us create the character for the care-receiver in a realistic way.

**Step 4:** Now is the time to practice aloud on anyone who will listen and ask them for feedback. It is a better judge of your storytelling skill to find out if the story spoke to them rather than if you told it with perfect gestures or inflection. So questions like “What did the story say to you? How might the story affect your life?” are more helpful than asking technical questions about how you told the story. If the story spoke to them in some meaningful way, then you are most likely doing a good job. If the story did not seem to speak to them, one technical question you might ask after inquiring about what they learned from the story is, “Was anything I did or didn’t do as I told the story distracting or confusing?”

### *Example of How a Story is Learned*

The following example walks through the process for both learning a story and keeping the Storytelling Journal. Please refer to the Sample Storytelling Journal on page 53. Step one is to print out the story in the Storytelling Journal and read the story several times until you feel comfortable with it. If you have the time, “live with” the text for a few days taking it with you to various places and reading it in those contexts. This may give you a broader insight into the text. The story used in this example is the story of the Canaanite woman:

Just then a Canaanite woman from that region came out and started shouting, "Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David; my daughter is tormented by a demon." But he did not answer her at all. And his disciples came and urged him, saying, "Send her away, for she keeps shouting after us." He answered, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." But she came and knelt before him, saying, "Lord, help me." He answered, "It is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs." She said, "Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table." Then Jesus answered her, "Woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish." And her daughter was healed instantly. (Matthew 15:22-28)

After reading the story until you feel comfortable with it, begin step 2 in the process which is to identify a very simple outline with no more than five points keeping the outline as concise as possible. My outline, which I have recorded in the Storytelling Journal, looks like this:

- 1) Woman's Failed Approach to Jesus
- 2) Disciple's and Jesus' Assessment of the Situation
- 3) Woman's 2nd Approach to Jesus
- 4) Daughter is healed.

When it is time to tell the story, I will keep these four points (or scenes) in mind, concentrating on describing one scene at a time.



Now it is time to analyze the story, which is step 3. Start by deciding on the mood of the story. The initial mood set by the woman is “desperate.” We find out her daughter is being tormented by a demon and she is desperate to get help, but when Jesus does not answer this desperate woman, the mood shifts to “confused.” Why would Jesus not answer the woman? Why do the disciples not have compassion on her? Why would Jesus compare her (and all Gentiles) to domesticated dogs? Then the mood shifts back to desperation as the woman continues to beg for help. And finally Jesus gives the response we expected all along and the mood changes and ends with relief. I record this information in my storytelling journal while I consider ways to convey the change of mood to my care-receiver. Desperation is easily conveyed by wrinkling the brow. Confusion can be demonstrated by the shaking of the head from right to left and hands turned up with palms open. Relief can be conveyed by putting a pause followed by a sigh of relief in just the right place: “And then <pause> Jesus healed her <sigh>.”

An important aspect of analyzing the text for the purpose of retelling it is to look for any remarkable phrases or words that should be memorized and used verbatim in the retelling. There are two things that Jesus says that one might want to memorize because they sound outlandish and are completely unexpected: “I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel” and “It is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs.” And of course, “Woman, great is your faith,” sums up what Jesus had wanted to emphasize about the woman all along. It wasn’t her nationality that mattered – or the fact that her shouting was annoying. It was her faith that counted.

Doing the character analysis can be fun especially when choosing modern day people to help formulate the characters in your mind. There are four characters in this

story: the woman, the disciples, Jesus, and the daughter. It helps me to talk about the woman if I visualize her as Angelina Jolie's character in *The Changeling*, a story about a single mother whose son vanishes. Angelina Jolie's character will not take no for an answer when confronting the authorities as she searches for her son. When I tell the story, I will picture Angelina Jolie's determination and frustration with the authorities whom she knows can help her if she can convince them to take her seriously. Likewise, I will picture the disciples in this story as a Greek Chorus in an ancient Greek tragedy who speak as one voice echoing what everyone is thinking, but no one wants to say aloud because it would be rude. In unison, they say, "Her shouting is annoying us!" I never assign a member of the trinity another character simply because the members of the trinity are unique. So I do not associate a character with Jesus. For the daughter, I can easily draw from my experience and picture one of the many psychologically ill girls that I encountered during my work as a pastoral intern at a children's hospital.

Now it is time to begin practicing the story on anyone who will listen. Record feedback in the storytelling journal and refine your style as you learn.

**Table 2 Storytelling Journal Example: Canaanite Woman**

Storytelling Journal: The Canaanite Woman

**Scripture: Matthew 15:22-28** <sup>22</sup> Just then a Canaanite woman from that region came out and started shouting, "Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David; my daughter is tormented by a demon." <sup>23</sup> But he did not answer her at all. And his disciples came and urged him, saying, "Send her away, for she keeps shouting after us." <sup>24</sup> He answered, "**I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.**" <sup>25</sup> But she came and knelt before him, saying, "Lord, help me." <sup>26</sup> He answered, "**It is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs.**" <sup>27</sup> She said, "Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table." <sup>28</sup> Then Jesus answered her, "**Woman, great is your faith!** Let it be done for you as you wish." And her daughter was healed instantly.

**Outline** (No more than 5 points):

- 1) Woman's Failed Approach to Jesus
- 2) Disciple's and Jesus' Assessment of the Situation
- 3) Woman's 2nd Approach to Jesus
- 4) Daughter is healed.

**Mood Shifts:**

Desperation → Confusion → Desperation → Relief

**Highlight Phrases in the Text to Memorize** (Note: They are highlighted in bold in the text in this example)

**Characters:** (Underline characters in the text above and then identify characters with someone you know)

- 1) Woman = Angelina Jolie in *The Changeling*. She plays a mother who will not take no for an answer when it comes to finding her lost son.
- 2) Disciples = Greek Chorus echoing what everyone is thinking, but no one wants to be the rude person to say it.
- 3) Daughter = A young girl from my experience as an intern at a children's hospital with a severe psychological disorder.
- 4) Jesus = himself. I never identify Jesus or the trinity with another person, since they are unique.

**Feedback:**

Listener pointed out that the woman was shouting at Jesus and his disciples so she shouldn't be portrayed as quietly desperate, but vocal.

## **Telling the Story**

### *Telling the Story from a Particular Angle*

When it comes to actually telling the biblical story, my favorite approach is to simply tell the story and let the Holy Spirit work. However, there are several other interesting approaches found in scripture. Although the storyteller is not limited to these approaches, they are interesting to consider.

First there is “The Character Swap Approach.” This is what Nathan (2 Samuel 12) and the Wise Woman of Tekoah (2 Samuel 14) do to King David on two different occasions. King Ahab’s Smitten Prophet (1 King 20) also uses this approach on King Ahab. In each case, the storyteller tells the story as if it is currently happening. Then they let the hearer develop an opinion of and cast judgment on the main character in the story. As soon as the hearer has committed themselves, the storyteller reveals that the hearer is very much like this character, therefore bringing them under their own judgment. In all three of these examples, this approach is very affective.

However, there is a modification of “The Character Swap Approach” known as “The Swap and Run Approach.” This is what Judges 9:7 Jotham, does to Abimelech’s supporters in Judges 9. He tells the story of trees – identifying his enemy’s choice of King with tumbleweed instead of a valuable tree. And then he runs for his life! Perhaps this modification of The Character Swap Approach is the approach to use when you realize your care-receiver is irreversibly insulted by your comparison. Seriously, one does need to be prepared for a negative reaction from the care-receiver. Be prepared to continue to show them love and concern should they react negatively to or are insulted by your story.

The last approach is “The Plant a Seed Approach.” Jesus used this approach often in his ministry. He told the story, let it sit, would occasionally interpret it – sometimes for everyone, sometimes just for his closest followers. He often just planted the seed. An example of this is in Mark 4:33-34. Mark records that it is “with many such parables he spoke the Word to them, as they were able to hear it; he did not speak to them except in parables, but he explained everything in private to his disciples.” Jesus used these stories about every day ordinary things to speak the Word of God to us. The phrase “as they were able to hear it” indicates that parables gave him a way to speak the truth in ways they were not only able hear, but also in ways that would be memorable and informative later on. And apparently the disciples also received some private tutoring that the crowds did not always receive. Jesus also seemed to allow for different people to identify with different characters in the story. We see an example of this when Jesus tells the Parable of the Prodigal Son in Luke 15. Some people will relate to the young brother, glad that God has redeemed them. Others will relate to the older brother confused about God’s brand of fairness. Still others may relate to the Father wanting to offer grace to others like God has offered it to them. God may work in many ways in these parables – giving us identity with different aspects of the story at different times to bring about his purposes.

Care givers often ask if there is a certain type of personality that wouldn’t be receptive to storytelling. It would be easy to answer that by saying what I once heard a seasoned preacher say to a group of student preachers, “Adults are just big children - they love to hear a good story.” But in chapter 7 of her book, *The Story Factor*, Annette Simmons addresses three personality types that challenge the storyteller: the unwilling,

the unconcerned, and the unmotivated. She says that the problem with people who have reached this level of hopelessness is that they are “unable to imagine a positive story.” They may “need to bleed off their negativity before they can move on. Your first step may be to listen to their story.” Picture what our hearts must look like to the Holy Spirit. Our hearts are often so filled with baggage that needs to be removed so that the Holy Spirit can get through to us. The person who is unwilling, unconcerned, and unmotivated has a heart so blocked that something has to go. Helping the person tell their story will often loosen up what is keeping them from hearing the word of God. I think we see King David do this in some of the Psalms that he wrote. For instance in Psalm 10 David begins to tell his story – what seems like anger at God – with verses like: “In arrogance the wicked persecute the poor” and “Their mouths are filled with cursing and deceit and oppression; under their tongues are mischief and iniquity.” David is getting out of his system his negative feelings that God is allowing the wicked to prosper. It is after he has gotten this baggage out of his heart, that he then begins to see what God is doing, “O LORD, you will hear the desire of the meek; you will strengthen their heart, you will incline your ear to do justice for the orphan and the oppressed, so that those from earth may strike terror no more.” If you find yourself faced with a care-receiver who can see no hope, no positive ending, then first listen so that the baggage can be purged, similar to a good long cry, and their hearts will be freed up to hear God speak.

### *Six Essentials of Telling the Story*

There are six essentials of telling the story that every story teller should be aware of: Voice, Silence, Gestures, Eye Contact, Facial Expressions, and Language. Don’t neglect these aspects. According to Annette Simmons in *The Story Factor*, words are

less than 15% of what listeners “hear” (Simmons, 86). The paragraphs below will make the story teller aware of these essentials and how to master them.

The voice is an important storytelling tool. By changing one’s pitch, the characters in the story can seem excited (higher pitch) or solemn (lower pitch). By changing the pace of one’s voice, the action in the story can be rapid (fast pace) or relaxed (slow pace). Using different volume (loud volume or a whisper) for different words can emphasize important points in the story. Inflection, changing tone within a word, can form a question (rising inflection). Most adults use and accentuate these voice techniques unabashedly and instinctively when reading or telling stories to small children, but often stifle the techniques when speaking to adults. If the storyteller can remember that adults are just big children who like to hear a good story, they may have an easier time at retaining the techniques that come natural to them around children.

The use of silence can enhance a segment in a story by pausing as the segment begins and giving the hearer time to anticipate. Pausing after a segment clues the hearer that something just said needs their attention.

Gestures can be used in a variety of ways to illustrate adjectives (“it was this tall”), to show direction (“the man walked over there”), and to emphasize actions or words (as with a hand slapped down on a table timed with a particular word). But don’t let your gestures turn into a caricature of an excited Italian. In fact, the more subtle the gesture, the more persuasive it can be.

Eye contact with your listener is very important. It builds a relationship between you and the care-receiver. Talk directly to the person or persons you are telling the story

to. Pay attention to their reactions. If they aren't keeping up, backtrack. If they are bored, adjust.

Use vivid language so that emotion is stirred within the care-receiver. The Psalmists were particularly good at this: "Like arrows in the hand of a warrior are the sons of one's youth" (Psalm 127:4). Can't you visualize the rough hands of the warrior competently and bravely holding his arrows?

Be aware of the facial expressions that you use and what affect they will have on the care-receiver. A smile will put them at ease. A stern look sets them on the defensive and tells them there is something unlikeable about this story.

Attention to the six storytelling essentials will make the story more memorable. But it is the storyteller's job to make sure they are true to the text. The story of Jesus turning over the tables wouldn't be well served if told without a hint of anger. Jesus saying "My burden is light" would be better served with open arms than a tight fist.

### *General Storytelling Tips*

The following are some general tips applicable to the telling of the story.

Remember that storytelling in a pastoral care setting is not a dramatic performance. You will scare or embarrass the care-receiver if you become too dramatic. Do not overwhelm the care-receiver, but tailor your storytelling to help them relate to the story. The story is the focus.

Initiating the story is fairly easy when someone has requested counseling. Simply tell the care-receiver that there is a story that might apply to their life. It is more difficult to initiate a story when doing visitation or during an informal occasion, because the person has not asked for your advice and telling a story can sometimes seem like you are



preaching at the person. “I want to tell you a story that relates to your situation” may sound unexpected and pushy to a care-receiver. Simmons, an activist who uses storytelling to educate, teaches her readers the technique of “dropping a seemingly nonsensical statement relating the person’s situation to the story” (Simmons 2002, 78) into a conversation. Her goal is to elicit a question from the hearer. Perhaps she might say with excitement, “that person you just described reminds me of a seed trying to sprout on top of a rock.” Then when the hearer asks, “What do you mean by that?” The storyteller has then been invited to tell the Parable of The Sower. Her goal, of course, is to get an invitation from the hearer to tell the story.

### **Discussing the Story**

Immediately after telling the story, several things may happen as the care-receiver ponders the story. After a moment of reflection and answering any question the care-receiver might have, ask the care-receiver, “What does this story mean to you?” They immediately may see what you have expected them to see, or it is possible that they will have a wrong or harmful interpretation of the story. Your first job is to listen to them to see what God has revealed to them from his word. Don’t rush to correct even a blatant misinterpretation. Give God time to work in the person’s heart and mind. Instead clarify any details about the story that they may have not understood and then ask questions that will allow them to share with you why they are interpreting the story a certain way: “It sounds like you relate to the male character the most. Why is that?” or, “Do any of the characters remind you of people you know?” or, “It sounds like the story made you feel relieved. Why is that?” The questions you ask may very well enable them to straighten out blatant misinterpretations. But if not, before the end of the session, suggest they

consider whatever the more orthodox interpretation might be. For instance, when I told the story of the Prodigal son to an elderly man who was estranged from his family, he interpreted it to mean, “We should only forgive people who come to us and beg us for forgiveness.” After talking a bit more, I realized that he did not understand God’s grace – he thought salvation must be earned. As Paul so clearly wrote to Titus, “They profess to know God, but they deny him by their actions.” Paul taught Titus that what we believe about God affects how we live and treat others. This man’s belief that God makes us earn our salvation gave him permission to be ungracious and unloving to those he should be forgiving, nurturing, and loving. He thought he knew God, but his actions showed he didn’t. I realized that I needed to first introduce this man to Jesus so that he could interpret the story and begin living with actions that show he really does know God.

Your pastoral care does not end with the telling of a story or even the end of a counseling session or visit. Now is the time to give God time to work. Let the care-receiver sit with the story for an appropriate time. If they have suffered a tragedy, checking in on them daily for a while is appropriate. If the care is routine in nature, then a week or two is not out of line. When you visit with them again, ask them if they have had a chance to think about the story you told them. If things have gone well, they will mostly likely be learning from the story. Ask a few questions about how or if the story has affected their life. Are there things they want to pursue because of it? What action items might the story have generated for them? Discuss these with them. You might even come to the visit armed with another story that has the potential for further conversation.

## Post Care Activities

Telling a biblical story is like planting a seed. The more you water and care for the seed, the more likely it is to flourish. Ed Brody, in his book *Spinning Takes, Weaving Hope*, offers the advice that a story is even more likely to take root if the care-receiver is given follow-up activities. He says doing this will “foster insightful understanding of the stories and ways of translating the stories’ teaching into our lives” (pg 16). Here are some possible things to ask your care-receiver if they are interested in doing:

- Review the story by retelling it in some creative form. People are more creative than you might imagine. An artist might draw the story. A writer could pen it in their own words. A potter might make a sculpture or even a plaque. A photographer could try to capture the story creatively through their photos. Even a gardener might find ways to remind themselves of the story in a corner of their garden. Someone might act out the story. This activity would help them think about the events of the story and even develop a deeper understanding of the emotions and characters in the story. The activity isn’t something they need to show you, but is for them to explore as they desire and to share it if they wish.
- Put together an action plan by having the care-receiver translate what they have learned into direct action in their lives. The scope of these actions can range from tiny (the prodigal son story might influence someone to contact a sibling they have not been in contact with in a few weeks) to grand (the story of the Jonah might inspire someone to start an evangelism outreach program in the community). Ask them to evaluate the story looking for actions to take and then set some goals and dates.

- Ask them to look at the story from different perspectives. It might be helpful to retell themselves the story in a variety of locations – at the bus station, in the park, at home, at work – and to consider the implication of the story in these different surroundings. The story of David and Goliath takes on a different flavor when you retell it to yourself after an unpleasant corporate meeting than when you considered it as you waited for diagnostic tests to come back.

Different care-receivers will feel differently about these activities. If you sense there is one that they might enjoy, then suggest it without placing any pressure on the person that you will be evaluating them through it – unless, they ask you to hold them accountable for the sake of making progress.

### Getting the Family and Community Involved

Pastoral storytelling does not have to be just a one-on-one care giving activity. The larger church family can be involved, as well. A church that I served had a young pregnant woman who began coming with her father to services a few months before her baby was due. Both the father and the young woman bordered on being mentally handicapped. They were squatting in a house near the church without running water and heat. The young woman, in particular, had many emotional problems which kept her both from learning and making good decisions for herself. After the child was born, the hospital released the baby and mother into this hopeless situation. Not surprisingly, the baby failed to flourish. The elders began to be very concerned over the baby who at six months was still no larger than its birth weight. We counseled the mother on feeding and caring for the child, we brought her food and made sure the baby had formula, and nothing worked. We begged her to take the baby to see the doctor and she would not.

Finally, with no other choice, someone in the church called the Department of Family and Child Services (DFACS). The police showed up one night at the young woman's house and took the child from her. The mother came to my office the next Sunday morning distraught believing that someone in the church had betrayed her. How do you explain to someone who is mentally and emotionally challenged that someone did this out of love for her and her baby? The situation reminded me of the paralyzed man whose friends lowered him through the roof to Jesus (Luke 5:17-26). She was like the paralyzed man – she was mentally unable to care for her baby alone. But she had friends that wanted to help her. In a sense, in calling DFACS, they had brought her to a place that would help her. Just like the paralyzed man's friends brought him to Jesus. This story was appropriate for her to hear. But it was even more helpful for those trying to care for her to hear. They had doubts and concerns that they had done the right thing. Imagine how those men felt lowering their friend through the roof. Is this the right way to go? Are we going to get in trouble for damaging the roof? How will we pay for this? Will Jesus really help our friend? She could identify with the paralyzed man who had friends! She really began to understand what trouble her friends had gone to for the sake of her baby as DFACS gave her classes and support. She could watch the baby getting healthy and could see her friends had done the right thing. And the elders and care givers at my church identified with the paralyzed man's friends and stopped fretting over whether they had done the right thing. When any of those involved began to doubt, we retold one another the story. Not only did we bond around a story of the gospel, but we drew courage and strength from God's word knowing that we have a savior who heals all kinds of problems and we have friends who will care for us even when it is not easy.

This storytelling practice can also be used within families to support one another too. While doing an internship at Children's Hospital, the mother of a teenager who had a terminal disease asked how to talk to her teenage son about his likely death. The teenager was very ill and had accepted his disease far more than his parents had. We talked it over and decided when the time was right, she could begin a conversation by telling him the story of Lazarus's death and resurrection (John 11). The story is a good one in that it expresses the grief that Mary and Martha feel over their loved one's illness and approaching death. It demonstrates the desire for Jesus to swoop in and heal. And then it reveals the deep, horrible, disappointment that Jesus has other plans than healing Lazarus before his death. The mother could identify with Martha and Mary feeling that Jesus wasn't doing everything he could do for their loved one. Even Jesus expresses his pain with tears. But the story doesn't end in despair. There is a reason for the death. And while the mother and son realized that in this life they would not be reunited, a day is coming when Jesus would raise them both from the dead. The mother continued to tell this story after her son's death and remembered with increasing peace the conversations she and her son had about the story and their future reunion. Again, they bonded around the word of God seeing hope and a future, when the secular world would have seen none.

### Suggested Stories

A pastoral care giver needs to continuously add to their repertoire of stories to tell. Don't have a "one story fits all" mentality. Don't be like the doctor who had only one piece of diagnostic equipment and used that same piece of equipment to diagnosis both blood disorders and broken bones. One size doesn't fit all. So carefully pick your story to match your care-receiver's needs. The following two charts can be very helpful

to that end. The first is a list of five stories every care giver should know. They will serve you well in a variety of situations. The second list is a more comprehensive list grouped by potential pastoral care situations. You might refer to this list as you search for stories to tell in different pastoral care situations.

### **Five Stories Every Care giver Needs to be Able to Tell**

You would be surprised how many pastors and lay leaders cannot readily tell these stories which are key to our faith. They may have the general gist and can summarize them in a sentence or two, but they are unable to tell the story with authentic character portrayal and mood, something that the early church leaders might have found astonishing since the good news was most often told orally. If the care giver works on getting these stories down first, then they will have a variety of stories to tell to care-receivers covering a variety of common care giving circumstances.

**Table 3 Five Stories Every Care giver Should be Able to Tell**

Story	Appropriate Uses
<b>The Serpent -</b> Genesis 3	<p><b>Obedience:</b> Those who are personally struggling with clear moral choices may relate to Eve, whereas those who are worried about how to help a loved one who is struggling with moral choices may relate to Adam.</p> <p><b>Accountability:</b> This is an excellent story for those not taking responsibility for their choices, as long as, the story is coupled with an explanation of God's grace. They may respond to the consequences of Adam and Eve's falling out of relationship with God.</p> <p><b>Nature of Evil:</b> Those who have questions about the nature of good and evil often enjoy exploring this story. It can often help to alleviate worries that one has personally caused tragedy to occur and instead see the universal effects of all sin in the world.</p> <p><b>Manipulation:</b> The snake is a wonderful manipulator and deceiver. Those who have either been the victim of manipulation or who are the manipulative offender can benefit from seeing the subtleness of evil in the half truths that the snake tells.</p>
<b>The Prodigal Son -</b> Luke 15:11-32	<p><b>Forgiveness and Self Worth:</b> This is a wonderful story for those who need to experience forgiveness and to see how much God values them. They will be able to relate the prodigal son.</p> <p><b>Un-forgiveness and Jealousy:</b> The prodigal brother demonstrates the heart that is unwilling to forgive and accept.</p> <p><b>Family Separation:</b> Those not in healthy relationships with their parents or children often see the father's example of forgiveness and the need to model this kind of unconditional love with members in their own family.</p>
<b>Joseph -</b> Genesis 37, 39-45:8	<p><b>Unjust Treatment or Abandonment:</b> Those who have been treated unjustly or abandoned by those they trusted will identify with Joseph.</p> <p><b>Trials or Tragedy:</b> Those experiencing trials or tragedy will find comfort in watching Joseph rely on God and overcome great odds.</p> <p><b>Forgiveness:</b> Joseph demonstrates forgiveness for those who have hurt him. But those who have treated others unjustly can also experience redemption in this story by exploring how God works his will even when there was an intention to harm.</p>
<b>The Resurrection &amp; Instructions -</b> Matthew 28:1-20	<p><b>Seekers and Doubters:</b> This is an important story for all Christians to be able to tell. It gives witness to the testimony of those closest to Jesus and who saw the resurrection first hand.</p> <p><b>Purposelessness and Priorities:</b> Jesus reveals the purpose for his followers at the end of this story. This story can be a wonderful reminder to those who are feeling their life lacks meaning of their calling.</p>
<b>The Return of God - I</b> Thessalonians 4:13-5:6	<p><b>Death:</b> Those fearing death and those experiencing the death of a loved one can be comforted by the story Paul tells of our future: "There is coming a day when Jesus will return with a cry of command..."</p>



## **Twenty Stories to Use in Different Pastoral Care Situations**

The following reference chart is set up with suggestions of appropriate stories for different situations. Many stories can be told in a variety of situations. For instance the same story that helps one who desires to know they are forgiven may help the one who needs to forgive. This chart will help the care giver consider the needs of the care-receiver and pick out suitable stories.

Before you begin, here are a couple of notes on certain types of stories that you will find below. A couple of stories in this chart, such as “Sheep Living with Wolves (Matthew 10:16-39) listed under “Adversity,” are described as for the “creative” storyteller. These are occasions in scripture where the original text is not so much a story as it is a metaphor. But the creative story teller can take these metaphors and easily develop them into memorable stories. For instance, in Sheep Living with Wolves, instead of just stating cold hard facts, the creative storyteller can turn the details Jesus provides in this metaphor into a very memorable story. Your version might begin, “A group of sheep had been given a difficult mission: to go into the wolf camp and give them good news. Now you might not think giving your enemies good news would be as bad as giving them bad news, but the wolves weren’t convinced the sheep’s message was good news. So the sheep, which have no way to defend themselves, were in a very dangerous situation.” The story will become even more interesting if the real life habits of sheep and wolves are researched a bit by the storyteller.

There are also a few stories that are very long spanning whole books of the Bible. Don’t be daunted by these stories. You will not be able to give every detail of each story or represent each character in the story without burdening your listener. So concentrate

on the main character, a few minor characters and get the gist of the story down. This will take extra work just due to the time it takes to read the story, but can be invaluable to your care-receiver.

**Table 4 Stories for Various Pastoral Care Situations**

<b>Stories for Various Pastoral Care Situations</b>	
<b>Need</b>	<b>Story and Suggestions</b>
Accountability	<p><b>Ten Pounds (Luke 19:11-27):</b> The soon-to-be king gives more responsibility to those who act responsibly and takes from those who have behaved irresponsibly with what he has entrusted them. Both those who are floundering and those who have done well with their responsibilities can identify with this story.</p> <p><b>The Serpent (Genesis 3):</b> This is an excellent story for those not taking responsibility for their choices, as long as, the story is coupled with an explanation of God's grace. They may respond to the consequences of Adam and Eve's falling out of relationship with God.</p>
Addictions	<p><b>House Built in the Sand (Matthew 7:24-27):</b> Often those who have addictions have made choices that they can equate with "building a house on the sand." This story is a great way to generate conversations about how to relocate one's "house" to a rock.</p>
Adultery/ Lust	<p><b>The Pet Lamb (2 Samuel 12):</b> Nathan tells David a story to emphasize how David has hurt his others with his infidelity. It causes David to repent of his sin. Someone who has been hurt or even someone who is committing the act of infidelity can relate to this story either as a tool for seeing a need for repentance or comfort in understanding that what they are going through is legitimately very painful and that God is not pleased with the behavior.</p> <p><b>Destroyed Body Parts (Matthew 5:27-32):</b> In this scripture, Jesus not only teaches about the heart's desire to commit adultery being equal with the actual sin, but he tells a very short story in verses 29-30 that gets right to point. A possible suggestion is to tell someone struggling with marital unfaithfulness just the story. You can even tell the story in first person: "I knew a man (or woman) whose eye caused them to sin, they gouged it out and threw it away..." Like many of Jesus' stories, it is shocking. Let the story sit with them for a while, then discuss what they learned from it and then share with them Jesus' interpretation of the story in the preceding verses.</p>
Adversity	<p><b>Elijah and the Broom Tree (1 Kings 18:24-19:4):</b> "There is a funny little man in the middle of the dessert huddle under a spindly little broom tree. He is far too big and the tree is far too small to provide him any shade." One might imagine this person to be a vagrant or someone who is lost. But it is the most powerful prophet of his day. He is scared. He begs God to take his life. This is a very powerful story for anyone who is experiencing adversity especially adversity related to one's faith.</p> <p><b>Sheep Living with Wolves (Matthew 10:16-39):</b> This scripture gives the</p>

Stories for Various Pastoral Care Situations	
Need	Story and Suggestions
	<p>creative storyteller an opportunity to expand Jesus' teachings into a short story about sheep being sent into a community of wolves. What happens to these sheep is described in these verses. The solution of course, is for the sheep to be like snakes and doves – what that means is also described in these verses.</p> <p><b>Daniel in the Lion's Den (Daniel 6):</b> Daniel is facing adversity, but his faithfulness to God testifies to a whole nation.</p> <p><b>Joseph (Genesis 37, 39-45:8):</b> Joseph demonstrates forgiveness for those who have hurt him. But those who have treated others unjustly can also experience redemption in this story by exploring how God works his will even when there was an intention to harm.</p>
Anger	<b>Brother's Offering (Matthew 5:22-24):</b> Here is an opportunity to tell the story of a brother who has called his brother a fool. He takes his offering to God, but God doesn't want it. So he leaves his gift and goes to be reconciled with his brother before offering it.
Anxiety	<b>Mary sits at Jesus' Feet (Luke 10:38-42):</b> Anxious people will identify with Martha. And a good discussion can take place about not just doing "too much", but why is it that Mary listening to Jesus is a better thing than being busy? The question can be asked: Are you sitting at Jesus' feet learning or are you assuming that you know what Jesus wants you to do?
Burnout	<b>Dry Bones (Ezekiel 37):</b> God revives dead bones by putting God's spirit within them. Someone who is suffering burnout will identify with the need for supernatural revival.
Comfort that God cares despite our shortcomings	<p><b>Jacobs Ladder (Genesis 28:11-22):</b> Jacob, the deceiver, who years earlier manipulates his brother out of his birthright, has a dream and in it God demonstrates his love and concern for Jacob. It can be helpful for the care-receiver to think about what dream God might give them to comfort them.</p> <p><b>Samson (Genesis 13-16):</b> Samson was not a righteous young man. He was impetuous and passionate (often about all the wrong things). But the text tells us that God was leading him. If God can use a person like Samson, no telling how God might use us.</p> <p><b>Tamar, Rahab, Bathsheba, and Ruth (Matthew 1:1-17):</b> Matthew chapter one is the genealogy of Jesus which could make for a very boring story. However, it contains the names of the four notable women mentioned in the title of this story. Tamar and Rahab were prostitutes. Bathsheba had an affair with David. And then there is Ruth who was a Moabite (a non-Jew). The creative story teller can weave these stories together showing that God is able to take the broken ends of our lives and weave them into a purposeful and meaningful design. These were the great grandmothers of Jesus.</p>
Cost of Discipleship	<b>Ezekiel looks Foolish (Ezekiel 4:1-5:10):</b> In our culture, it is pretty important to people to maintain their dignity. But sometimes God calls us to be foolish looking in standing up for what is right. Ezekiel looks pretty foolish and makes some people pretty mad as he acts out God's prophecy.

Stories for Various Pastoral Care Situations	
Need	Story and Suggestions
	<p><b>Building a Tower (Luke 14:25-33):</b> The cost of being a disciple is high. Jesus wants us to count this cost before setting out on the journey. Our culture so often makes salvation into a ticket to heaven and “favored” status from God. This story connects following Jesus to the reality of what may be a very difficult life.</p> <p><b>Eye of the Needle (Matthew 19:16-30):</b> This is a shocking account of what a Christian should possess. The listener might consider how well their life style conforms to this teaching.</p>
Creation Care	<p><b>Adam was to care for God’s creation (Genesis 1-2:15):</b> The first job of humanity was to care for God’s creation. Those who do not see this as important can be reminded by rehearing the creation story culminating with God putting creation in Adam’s care.</p>
Death and Grief	<p><b>Lazarus (John 11:1-44):</b> This story is helpful in a variety of circumstances surrounding death. Both loved ones and the person who is dying can relate to the hope that it offers for the future. Jesus has power over death!</p> <p><b>The Return of God (I Thessalonians 4:13-5:6):</b> Those fearing death and those experiencing the death of a loved one can be comforted by the story Paul tells of our future: “There is coming a day when Jesus will return with a cry of command...”</p>
Decisions	<p><b>House on a Rock (Matthew 7:24-27):</b> This text can be used in a variety of circumstances. It may help to tell this story when someone is in the midst of discernment. Is there a choice that would likely be like end up being like the house built on sand?</p> <p><b>What Looks Good to the Eye (2 Kings 4:38-44):</b> This is a quirky story of a student prophet who inadvertently poisons the other seminarians. I have seen this story have great impact on someone who is making a decision. Looks can be deceiving. Will you make your decisions based on how things appear and human logic? Or is there a better way to make decision.</p>
Distractions to the Christian life (and lessons for the evangelist)	<p><b>Sowing Seed (Mark 4:3-9 and 14-20):</b> This story can be told to someone whose priorities and lifestyle are coming between them and God. They may relate to a variety of the situations that Jesus brings up in the story. Move the listener towards thinking about how they can become good soil. This is also an excellent story for anyone (and it should be all of us) who are actively witnessing to others. It explains why it doesn’t always work and may provide tips on more effective use of evangelistic witness.</p>
Discernment	<p><b>Talking Donkey (Numbers 22:22-34):</b> God wants Balaam to have an important message, but Balaam is unable to hear God. Why? God eventually uses a donkey to get Balaam’s attention. What might God be using to get your attention?</p>
Doubt	<p><b>Transfiguration (Matthew 17:1-3):</b> The Father tells those, who watch Jesus transfigure, to “listen to Jesus.” Often when we doubt, it is because we aren’t really listening to Jesus.</p> <p><b>John the Baptist Wonders (Luke 7:12-35):</b> John the Baptist, who is in prison, appears to need extra comfort as he sends his disciples to check on</p>

Stories for Various Pastoral Care Situations	
Need	Story and Suggestions
	<p>Jesus' credentials. Jesus assumes them that he is indeed the Messiah.</p> <p><b>Doubting Thomas (John 20:19-31):</b> Thomas doubted that Jesus had risen from the dead. But Jesus gives him all the proof he needs. A good question to someone who is having a crisis of faith is: "How is God demonstrating that he is the real deal to you?"</p>
Empowerment	<p><b>Vine and Branches (John 15:1-7):</b> The story of the Vine and Branches show that it is not by our own power that we achieve things, but by the power that dwells within us.</p>
Empowering Women	<p><b>Head Splitting Courage (Judges 4:1-23):</b> This is the story of two women, one is the leader of a nation and the other is a common woman, who act powerfully. This story can be encouraging for women who could benefit from strong role models.</p> <p><b>Mary, Mother of Jesus (Luke 1:26-56):</b> Mary takes on an enormous responsibility when she agrees to be the mother of the Messiah. Mary is another strong role model for women.</p> <p><b>Esther (Esther 1-10):</b> Esther saves her people and is a strong image for women to consider.</p>
Encouragement	<p><b>Gideon (Judges 6 -8):</b> God gives Gideon a task and promises Gideon that he will be with him. This promise is enough for Gideon and his faith benefits his people.</p>
Family Dynamics	<p><b>The Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-32):</b> Those not in healthy relationships with their parents or children often see the father's example of forgiveness and the need to model this kind of unconditional love with members in their own family.</p> <p><b>Mary and Martha (Luke 10:38-42):</b> The relationship between the women can be explored. It is especially important to notice how the desire to follow Jesus enters into that relationship and changes it.</p> <p><b>Children and the Kingdom (Matthew 18:1-6 and 19:13-14):</b> Jesus demonstrates the proper place of children in his kingdom.</p> <p><b>A Mother's Request (Matthew 20:17-28):</b> All mothers want the best for their children. But what if that means a life of hardship and sacrifice?</p>
Fear	<p><b>Walking on Water (Matthew 14:22-33):</b> Peter jumps into the adventure head on without realizing there are going to be problems. And when the reality hits, he becomes afraid. And his fear shows a lack of faith. Those whose lack of faith is born out of fear can often relate to Peter.</p>
Forgiveness	<p><b>The Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-32):</b> This is a wonderful story for those who need to experience forgiveness and to see how much God values them. They will be able to relate the prodigal son.</p> <p><b>Joseph (Genesis 37, 39-45:8):</b> Joseph demonstrates forgiveness for those who have hurt him. But those who have treated others unjustly can also experience redemption in this story by exploring how God works his will</p>

Stories for Various Pastoral Care Situations	
Need	Story and Suggestions
	<p>even when there was an intention to harm.</p> <p><b>Hosea (Hosea 1-14):</b> Humanity is Gomer, Hosea's cheating wife, whom God, the husband, keeps on loving. If God can keep on loving us despite our faithlessness; if Hosea can keep on loving Gomer despite her faithlessness, then can we demonstrate this kind of love in all of our relationships?</p>
Finances	<p><b>The Temple Box (Mark 12:41-44):</b> Through this story, Jesus teaches us to give out of love and faith... and to care for those in need.</p> <p><b>Birds and Lilies (Matthew 6:25-34):</b> Jesus wants us to know that our needs will be met. And that if we focus on today, then tomorrow's needs will be met. God is so much about our focus being on process and attitude – and so little about it being on outcome. He takes care of that for us.</p> <p><b>Eye of the Needle (Matthew 19:16-30):</b> This is a shocking account of the Christians relationship to wealth. How do we do what Jesus asks?</p>
Friends	<p><b>When you Throw a Party (Luke 14:12-14):</b> Friends are generally invited to a party that you throw. But here, people who are in need are invited. What would happen if a person concentrated on cultivating friendships with those who cannot repay them?</p>
Greed	<p><b>Bigger Storehouses (Luke 12:15-21):</b> Someone who is struggling with the faithful use of their resources may respond to these verses. Church boards often find this story useful during budget talks. A good question to follow up with is: "How do we use our resources to store up spiritual blessings?"</p>
Healthy Living	<p><b>Daniel and His Diet (Daniel 1):</b> Daniel pleases God by caring for his body in ways that make him mentally and physically healthy. Most of us can learn from Daniel's faithfulness to God even down to the food he eats.</p>
Humility	<p><b>When you get an invitation (Luke 14:7-11):</b> Here Jesus teaches his followers how to act in the world – not as those most deserving, but as those who are humble. This is helpful when a servant's heart needs cultivating.</p> <p><b>Foot Washing (John 13:1-17):</b> Jesus demonstrates servant leadership and calls the disciples to treat one another and others this way.</p>
Judgment/ Jealousy/ Intolerance	<p><b>Sawdust and Planks (Matthew 7:1-4):</b> "There was a man with a plank in his eye. He seemed not to notice it. But was greatly disturbed by the sawdust in his brother's eye..." For someone who is experiencing a critical spirit, this is a short story they can relate to. If the hearer is open to it, a discussion can follow allowing them to identify the plank.</p> <p><b>The Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-32):</b> The prodigal brother demonstrates the heart that is unwilling to forgive and accept.</p> <p><b>Tax Collectors (Luke 5:27-32):</b> Tax Collectors were considered the worst of humanity since they took Jewish property and gave it to their enemies. But Jesus had meals with tax collectors. The story asks the question: what kind of relationship should we have with the tax collectors in our lives?</p>



Stories for Various Pastoral Care Situations	
Need	Story and Suggestions
	<p><b>David Dances Naked (2 Samuel 6):</b> Someone who struggles with a rule oriented morality can benefit from identifying with the intolerant Michel who feels she has a market on knowing how God wants to be worshiped.</p> <p><b>Bartimaeus (Mark 10:46-52):</b> The crowd was intolerant of Bartimaeus' cries for help. They rejected him until Jesus said "Bring him to me." We will be unlikely to see Jesus perform miracles if we are not willing to bring those in great need to Jesus.</p>
Justice Issues	<p><b>The Good Samaritan (Luke 10:29-37):</b> Jesus extends the definition of neighbor in this story and also sets expectations of his followers to take action whenever there is need. This story is good both for those who need to explore Jesus' calling upon their lives, but also as affirmation to those who have not been cared for appropriately that Jesus does care about them.</p> <p><b>Requirements (Micah 6:1-8):</b> There are layers of stories buried in these 8 verses and mentioned by name. The creative storyteller will have to do some research to uncover them, but it is worth it for some of the most beautiful truths of our calling: "do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with our God."</p> <p><b>Amos (Amos 1-9):</b> Amos is the story of a man "kidnapped" by God away from the flock that he tended and placed in front of God's people to speak the truth that they were not living as a holy people. They were not just and they were not righteous. This is a very helpful story to offer encouragement to someone whom God has called to speak truth to power.</p>
Leadership	<b>Caleb Leads (Numbers 14):</b> Caleb leads – not by popular opinion – but by discerning the will of God.
Loneliness	<b>Ruth (Ruth 1-4):</b> Not only does God bring together two lovers, but this is also the story of a God who weaves our loneliness into a purposeful meaningful design.
Lying / Manipulation	<p><b>Jacob and Esau (Genesis 25, 27):</b> Jacob manipulates Esau out of his inheritance. This is an excellent story for those who have control issues. The story can help them see that they need to give God time to work instead of manipulating situations.</p> <p><b>Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1-11):</b> God demonstrates his opposition to manipulative behavior.</p> <p><b>The Serpent (Genesis 3):</b> The snake is a wonderful manipulator and deceiver. Those who have either been the victim of manipulation or who are the manipulative offender can benefit from seeing the subtleness of evil in the half truths that the snake tells.</p>
Memory Issues	<b>The Story of the Holy Spirit (John 14:26):</b> In John 14, Jesus tells his disciples that the Holy Spirit will remind them of all he has taught them. By accident, a woman who heard me retell this story in Sunday School one morning came up to me afterwards. She had had an accident in which her memory capacity was now very limited. She said to me, "I have been so worried that I could no longer teach my children about Jesus, but now I

Stories for Various Pastoral Care Situations	
Need	Story and Suggestions
	realize the Holy Spirit will remind me of exactly what to say to them.” This story can be helpful especially to the elderly who are experiencing memory loss. Their memory loss does not separate them from Jesus.
Mistreatment (Abuse)	<b>Bears and a Bald Head (2 Kings 2:23-24):</b> This story is quite vague. But can be used successfully to generate conversation about abuse. It is a story of a prophet who curses some children for making fun of his bald head. They are then attacked by a bear. It doesn’t say whether what the prophet did was right or wrong. But a prophet isn’t a prophet if his curses don’t pan out. This is a good opportunity to talk about why a loving God allows the abuse to occur. Why doesn’t God stop the prophet – do the children really deserve death? This story needs to be coupled the teaching that God does not approve of abusive behavior and in the end, he will not tolerate it.
Obedience	<b>Jericho (Joshua 6):</b> The story of the Battle of Jericho is a witness to the fact that God’s plans work. Someone who is struggling with obedience to God’s direction can often relate to this story where obedience to God’s plan (not a set of rules) is honored.  <b>The Serpent (Genesis 3):</b> Those who are personally struggling with clear moral choices may relate to Eve, whereas those who are worried about how to help a loved one who is struggling with moral choices may relate to Adam.
Patience	<b>Simeon and Anna (Luke 2:15-31):</b> Sometimes we have to wait on God to fulfill God’s promises in just the right time. Simeon and Anna both demonstrate lives of faithfulness despite a very long wait.
Pharisee-ism (Putting anything – especially religion before a relationship with Jesus)	<b>The Digestive Tract (Matthew 15:17-20):</b> This is one for the creative storyteller who doesn’t mind doing some research. It is very helpful to trace a morsel of food from the hand through the digestive system. And in turn, trace a thought through the “heart” (which here is more an organ in the mind or soul) to the mouth pointing out what really separates us from God.  <b>Sarah and Hagar (Galatians 4):</b> The original story of Sarah and Hagar is found in Genesis 21. But it is Paul’s interpretation that will be valuable for someone to consider who has replaced a relationship with God with a set of rules by which to live. Christians often get caught up in knowing the right rules and following them, but that is not what a relationship with God is all about – it is about being guided by the Holy Spirit to do the good works God created for us to do.  <b>Whitewashed Tombs (Matthew 23:27-28):</b> This encourages the hearer to think about whether or not their appearances match what is in their heart.
Politics instead of God’s Kingdom	<b>Like a Mustard Seed (Mark 4:30-32):</b> So many confuse involvement in earthly politics with the Kingdom of God. And yet, the Kingdom of God is like a mustard seed. Exploring this interesting scripture can help someone refocus on what it means to be a follower of Jesus rather than a political party supporter.  <b>On Watch (Luke 19:11-27):</b> The Kingdom of God is not set up by those of us on earth. And yet, we are to use the gifts God has given us to his glory.



Stories for Various Pastoral Care Situations	
Need	Story and Suggestions
	This story helps the listener consider what is the best return on their investment... touting their own political party or investing in the Kingdom of God.
Pre-Marriage Counseling	<b>Matchmaker Matchmaker (Genesis 24):</b> This story shows that our creator is interested in our meeting and falling in love.
Pride	<b>The Pharisee and Tax Collector pray at the Temple (Luke 18:9-14):</b> Shows we have to be careful when we think we have it all figured out.
Priorities and Purpose (of Jesus' followers)	<p><b>Bury my Father first (Luke 9:59-62):</b> This disciple wants to go and have a funeral for his father before he follows Jesus. Jesus tells him this is the wrong priority.</p> <p><b>Tower of Babel (Genesis 11):</b> We so often get our priorities wrong thinking our job is to becoming like God (i.e. to be self sufficient, to control our surroundings, to control those weaker than ourselves). But here we see God, who could <i>speak</i> whole worlds into being, setting straight the priorities of the people at Babel by confusing their <i>speech</i>. A good discussion question is: "What could God confuse in your life in order to get you to realize your priorities are not right."</p> <p><b>Jonah (Jonah 1-4):</b> Jonah paints the picture of a one who has forgotten that it was the purpose of the people of Israel to be a light to the nations. Many of Jesus' followers have also lost their purpose too – more interested in nourishing its own programs than caring for a hurting world.</p>
Rejecting the call to follow Jesus	<p><b>The Great Banquet (Luke 14:15-24):</b> We don't really like to think God ever gives up on anyone. But this can be a sobering story for someone who is either rejecting Christ all together or rejecting God's call upon their life.</p> <p><b>The Resurrection (Matthew 28:1-20):</b> This is an important story for all Christians to be able to tell. It gives witness to the testimony of those closest to Jesus and who saw the resurrection first hand.</p> <p><b>Lazarus Story (Luke 16:25-31):</b> The "other" Lazarus story, where a tormented man who has died asks for a sign to be given to his living family members so they will not suffer as he is doing.</p>
Rejection by Others	<p><b>Joseph (Genesis 37, 39-45:8):</b> Those who have been treated unjustly or abandoned by those they trusted will identify with Joseph.</p> <p><b>Beatitudes (Luke 6:19-34):</b> This is an excellent way for a creative storyteller to tell the story of someone who is suffering from rejection, "A poor, hungry, weeping man who has been rejected demonstrates the kingdom of God, (where there is satisfaction, food, and laughter) by loving and doing good for his enemies."</p> <p><b>Bartimaeus (Mark 10:46-52):</b> The crowd was intolerant of Bartimaeus' cries for help. They rejected him until Jesus said "Bring him to me." Others may reject us... they were too busy headed to Jerusalem for a party! But Jesus won't.</p>
Relationship	<b>Sound of Silence (I Kings 19):</b> Sometimes believers go through a spell

Stories for Various Pastoral Care Situations	
Need	Story and Suggestions
(Prayer) with God	<p>when we feel God is not available to us. Here is a story that might help to explain the nature of God's sometime overwhelming and sometimes quiet relationship with us.</p> <p><b>Praising God Opens Hearts to Experience God's Presence (2 Chronicles 5: 1-14):</b> People who feel far from God have often neglected praising God. Here is a story that shows the Israelites praising God which ushers the glory of God into the temple.</p> <p><b>Burning Bush (Exodus 3:1-15):</b> God gets Moses attention and gives him instructions through a burning bush. This story can be used to explore what medium God might be using to get the care-receiver's attention.</p>
Repentance	<p><b>Nebuchadnezzar's Tree (Daniel 4):</b> Nebuchadnezzar has a dream about a tree which Daniel interprets for him. The dream provokes good discussion about God's grace and what it means to be given a chance to repent.</p> <p><b>Loss of David's Son (2 Samuel 12:1-23):</b> Repentance restores David's relationship with God, but does not necessarily remove the consequences of the sin (the child does not live).</p>
Spiritual Warfare	<b>Angels in the Battlefield (Daniel 10):</b> For someone who feels that God has forgotten them, this is a helpful story about an angel of the almighty who has to fight off a fallen angel before he can reach Daniel with a message.
Suffering	<b>Job (Job 42):</b> Job has experienced terrible tragedy, but he does not lose faith in God. In fact, through the experience, he learns to depend on God and not himself. This is a difficult story and questions will surely arise about what seems to be the expendability of Job's first family. In exploring the questions, the care-receiver will likely be able to look toward the future instead of dwelling in the past – just as Job did.
Tragedy	<b>Noah's Ark (Genesis 6):</b> Often when tragedy strikes, what sweeps over us is the question, "Did God do this to punish me?" But in the story of Noah, God says, "Never again." He establishes a covenant of peace. This story can be helpful to someone who has experienced tragedy and is taking blame for it because of their past sins. This story will help them consider that the heart of God is one of mercy.
Unworthiness (Feeling of)	<p><b>The Great Banquet (Luke 14:15-24):</b> This is not just a story of those who reject Christ's call, but it is also a story for those who feel unworthy of God's invitation. Tell this story to someone who feels like an outsider to the Christian faith.</p> <p><b>Lot escapes (Genesis 18:16-22 and 19:15-29):</b> Lot is not exactly pure, but God shows him mercy by allowing him and his family to escape a place God has chosen to destroy. Lot escapes, but his wife turns back and is turned to salt. A good discussion question is, "Do you resemble Lot or his wife the most? Are you accepting God's mercy or questioning it?"</p> <p><b>Woman at the Well (John 4:1-42):</b> By human logic, the woman at the well has lived a life unworthy of Christ. But Jesus has compassion on her, and yet holds her accountable.</p>

Stories for Various Pastoral Care Situations	
Need	Story and Suggestions
	<b>Peter Denies Jesus (Mark 14):</b> Peter fails to stand up for Christ – and yet, Jesus uses him to be the rock of the church.
Wrestling with God	<b>Jacob Wrestles with God (Genesis 32:23-34):</b> This story demonstrates that it is not the end of the world if we feel the need to wrestle with God. Although God does show his strength in the match, it is in engaging God that we continue a relationship with him. One who is struggling with God may find a way to deal with his or her situation through this story.

## CHAPTER 5

### PASTORAL CARE STORYTELLING CASE STUDIES

The purpose of this chapter is to use case studies from my own ministry to both evaluate the benefit of using biblical storytelling in pastoral care and to generate possible suggestions for updating the guidebook developed in Chapter 4.

#### Criteria for Case Study Evaluation

It might be tempting, but it would be wrong to define a successful case study as one that results in immediate transformation in the care-receiver. The reason for this is that the Holy Spirit, not the storyteller, does the work of transforming the care-receiver's heart. The storyteller simply gets to participate in God's mission as the Holy Spirit opens the door and leads. The Holy Spirit's work does not depend on our flawless execution and follow-up. Nor does the Holy Spirit's timing necessarily line up with our storytelling session. Instead these storytelling case studies will be evaluated at the end of this chapter based on several criteria:

- **Execution:**
  - **Preparation:** Were any new insights gained in preparing for the storytelling session?
  - **Telling the Story:** What lessons did I learn from the storytelling session?

- **Follow-up:**
  - **Immediate Follow-up:** Was the follow-up discussion with the storyteller immediately following the story appropriate? What lessons did I learn from the immediate follow-up discussion?
  - **Post Care Activities:** Were follow-up activities or homework suggested? Were they beneficial? What lessons did I learn from the post care activities?
- **Outcome:**
  - **Individual Transformation:** What effect did biblical storytelling have on the care-receiver? Did the storytelling sessions initiate transformation? What might I do differently in the future?
  - **Community Transformation:** Did the storytelling affect the life of the larger community in any way? How might I include or not include the community in the future?

### Case Study Methodology

#### **Case Study Template**

I have found it helpful to use the following template in documenting the case studies for my storytelling ministry. The first half of the template is filled out prior to the storytelling session. The second half of the template is filled out after the session is over. Care givers may want to use this template to prepare for and track their own storytelling ministries.

**Table 5 Form for Case Studies**

**Case Study Title - Date**

Pre-Storytelling Work

**Background:** Present the care-receiver's background here. Provide information appropriate to their case such as age, gender, career, physical health assessment, family mental health history, family and social relationships, drug and alcohol history, life difficulties, goals, coping skills, and weaknesses.

**Description of the Problem as the Care-Receiver Understands It:** This section describes the care-receiver's problem from his or her perspective. It will describe any thoughts, feelings, and perceptions they have that are related to the problem.

**Spiritual Assessment:** Describe what you suspect is going on spiritually with the care-receiver and this situation. Explain how you reached this assessment. Explain any concerns.

**Appropriate Biblical Stories:** Describe which Biblical Story you are considering telling and what approach you intend to take with the story. What questions will you plan on asking? What follow up activities will you plan on suggesting?

Post-Storytelling Information

**Description of the Storytelling Session:** Describe what happened in the storytelling session including what follow up is planned with the care-receiver.

**Outcome:** Provide a spiritual assessment, further activity together (such as follow-up stories or discussions), and their outcome.

**Participant's Evaluation:** Contact the participant 3 months after the storytelling session and ask them to evaluate the experience with the following questions: Was the storytelling experience worthwhile? Did it prompt them to change in any way? How did it help them? What follow-up would they like to have?

## Five Case Studies

### **Case Study 1: Three Sisters – February 4, 2010**

#### *Background*

The care-receivers were three sisters. One sister was pre-adolescent and the other two sisters were in their teens. Their mother was a long time member of the church, but took on no real responsibility in the church. She was very likeable. Her attendance was somewhat frequent, but very inconsistent. Their father came only rarely, but when he did he was very friendly, calm, and had intelligent spiritual questions and comments. He had recently lost his job which I understood was a regular occurrence in his spotty career history.

The sisters' parents were fighting constantly and unbeknownst to the sisters were considering separating. Their mother had lost all respect for their jobless father. And she announced this to the general public whenever the topic came up.

On several occasions, I had witnessed their mother be verbally rough with the two older sisters for reasons that seemed ridiculous to me. She was very controlling of their every move and talked down to them. She had fun being verbally rough with others. But there was also a softer, contradictory side to her that wanted to care for those in need.

The sisters have been taught that following Jesus is important, but their parents' daily example was not stellar. Their mother smoked, cussed, and thought gossip was a sport where she shoots at other people's reputations. Her priorities were out of whack with how Jesus calls us to live. She was unaware of Jesus' teachings of how we are to live in community. Reaching her through sermons was hard given her irregular attendance.

The oldest sister was particularly attractive and had been homecoming queen several times. The middle sister does not have the same good looks as her older sister and she often took verbal abuse from the older sister – the same kind that the mother doled out on all of the sisters. The younger sister was somewhat set apart from the older sisters simply because of their age difference.

#### *Description of the Problem as the Care-receiver Understands It*

The three sisters were experiencing heightened fights between themselves. The two older sisters described the home atmosphere as “a battle zone.” The oldest asked me to pray for her and her sisters one day between Sunday school and church.

#### *Spiritual Assessment*

My spiritual assessment of the family as a whole was that the parents were not living into the commitment of prioritizing the things of Christ first. Because of a lack of right priorities (such as worshiping together, trusting God together, etc), they were not dealing well with the stressors in their lives. The girls were following their parents’ example of fighting instead of valuing and supporting each other.

#### *Appropriate Biblical Stories*

Since the sisters were the ones who had invited me into their situation, I focused on helping the sisters rather than their parents. I believed that if the sisters could begin to see Christ’s priorities for themselves that the issues they were having with each other would be manageable.



I picked out the story of Mary and Martha in Luke 10:38-42. A Wednesday night was approaching where the sisters and mother would be attending. I have made arrangements to talk to the sisters with the mother present.

I used this story to explore the relationships between the two sisters, Mary and Martha. I connected what was important to Jesus and what should be important to us. I led the sisters to think about their relationships and what is important to Jesus in their lives and how they can support each other in these priorities. I spoke with the mother and she agreed to attend as a listener rather than a participant.

#### *Description of the Storytelling Session*

The girls were very attentive, thrilled to be getting attention from the pastor. I asked them if I could tell them a story and get their reaction to it. They were happy to hear my story. I told them there were two sisters in this story who were friends with Jesus. And I was going to tell them the story in three different ways. The first time I would tell the story, it would be from the perspective of the sister named Martha; then I would tell it again from the perspective of the sister named Mary. I had prepared questions to ask after each perspective.

After telling the story from Martha's perspective, I asked the following questions and received the corresponding answers:

- Who do you think was the older sister? *They all thought Martha was probably the oldest sister. And a conversation opened about how the oldest sister not only bossed the two younger sisters around, but also took care of the two younger sisters.*

- What tasks do you think Martha was distracted with? Do you think these tasks were important? Do you think Martha's intentions were good? *They all agreed that she was probably taking care of things that needed to be done. Remarkably the younger sisters showed respect for the intentions of both Martha and their oldest sister.*
  
- Was Martha a tattler? Or did she have the right to complain? Why didn't she take her complaint directly to Mary? *They thought Martha had the right to complain and that she was also a tattler. But the younger sisters didn't think their oldest sister was a tattler at all – she would never tell on them. She would, however, take matters into her own hands and hence the fighting. At this point, it became obvious to me that the older sister was really taking on the role of mother to the other two sisters. They resented her doing this, but also appreciated it. They saw what their sister did for them as important to their well being. The oldest sister wasn't really mature enough to take on this role.*
  
- How do you suppose Jesus' answer made Martha feel about herself? *They sympathized with Martha and felt Jesus was being unfair. It seemed to them that Martha was doing the important stuff and that Mary was just "goofing around," but Martha was the one who got punished. This opened the door for me to talk about priorities with the sisters. Jesus set the priority for Martha and Mary. And it was to do in this moment what was needed – and in that moment it was needed to "goof off with Jesus." I turned to the oldest sister and said to her, "Your sisters think you do so many good things for them. Have you ever thought where the things you do fit in*

*Jesus' priorities?" She said sometimes they wouldn't do things she asked them to do because they were goofing off. The younger sisters came to her defense saying, "We are lazy sometimes." We talked about how sometimes it was okay to "goof off," but other times we need to work together to get things done. I asked them how they would decide when work had to be done and when goofing off was okay? They didn't know. So we talked about a variety of practical ways to tell. Approaching deadlines like homework due the next day needed to get done before it was too late at night, but cleaning up the bathroom might wait until after a visit with a friend – especially if that friend only had a short time before they had other obligations. Asking their parents for help in setting priorities was a really great thing to do too.*

Next I told the story from Mary's perspective. Afterwards, I asked the following questions and received the corresponding answers:

- Why do you think Mary wanted to be with Jesus instead of helping Martha? Do you think Mary's intentions were good? *They agreed that Jesus was fun to hang out with. Mary just wanted to be with her friend and hear his stories. They believed that Mary's intentions were good too. We talked about how when they fight, could it be possible that both sides have good intentions? And that talking things over might bring that to light rather than ending up on the floor pulling hair and scratching one another? I asked them to try and consider what the other person was feeling and thinking so that they can have compassion for them.*

- Do you think Mary knew what Martha's expectations were of her? They agreed that Mary probably did know that Mary needed help, but was ignoring it.

### *Outcome*

The sisters have had to cope with a lot of stress at home which is made worse by not having a strong spiritual influence in the home. Unfortunately, I believe the situation will only get worse as the parents will most likely separate. The parents have not been open with me about their situation and have not been open to mine and my husband's gestures of friendship so my method of care providing will most likely continue to be through the sisters.

The homework I gave the girls was to practice telling each other the story of Mary and Martha so that they could tell it to me the following Sunday. I asked them to think two things through whenever there is conflict: 1) What is Jesus' priority in this situation? And 2) how can we support each other rather than fight?

Their mother was reflective as she listened to all of this, but other than to say that the sisters really like me, she has not been open to discussing the situation with me.

The girls love reporting to me the details of any arguments now and on several Sundays have reported that there have been no fights at all. Best of all, they now "own" the story of Mary and Martha and have seen how the stories of the Bible apply to their lives.

### *Participant's Evaluation*

Three months later, I asked the girls what they thought about the day I told them the story of Mary and Martha. They said, "That was fun!" And they asked if I could tell

them another story. I believe the attention they got from the pastor was almost as important as the lessons they learned.

## **Case Study 2: Grace – March 10, 2010**

### *Background*

The care-receiver is in his seventies and has suffered from a very visible and disturbing physical disfigurement since childhood. The disfigurement was caused by an incompetent doctor and inattentive parents. It appears to me that he has learned to cope by acting self-deprecating and humble when engaged with strangers. One's first impression is that he is a gentle, emotionally intelligent man. But as you get to know him and hear stories from his children and grandchildren, it is obvious that inside him there are deep wounds that have not healed. He harbors resentment and the desire to be in control of those around him. He is easily angered and unforgiving.

After a sermon that I preached which focused on salvation being God's act of grace and not something we work to earn, he became increasingly upset with me. The church, where he has attended for thirty years as head elder, has been served by temporary seminary interns. Because they did not have consistent pastors, they have never been taught an overall view of our denomination's theology. The church has not had Sunday school classes or Bible studies until recently. Their theology, while inconsistent from congregant to congregant, is a homegrown hodgepodge and terribly unorthodox, especially in the areas of grace, forgiveness, and prayer.

After he confronted me about my sermon on grace, I asked the care-receiver to meet with me so I can show him through scripture what God has revealed to us about grace. His words were, "I don't want any Bible verses!" And he refused to meet with me.

A week or so later, I asked him if we could sit down and talk again. This time he smiled and said, "We don't have a problem." But I could see that his smile and words were only trying to hide anger that was growing inside of him.

#### *Description of the Problem as the Care-receiver Understands It*

The care-receiver explained to me after my sermon that he is afraid that my teaching on salvation by grace rather than works will cause "misbehaving" from the congregation (especially his children who are in their late 40s and his grandchildren) and that they will end up in hell rather than heaven.

#### *Spiritual Assessment*

I do not believe that the care-receiver is as concerned about the spiritual well-being of his family as he claims. I believe that he is actually more concerned about maintaining his control over his children and grandchildren. His extended family comes to this church only because he makes life in this small town very uncomfortable for them when he does not get his way. Both children's spouses have expressed to me that they do not feel comfortable in their father-in-law's church and wish to go to churches where their families are better fed. When he became the Sunday school teacher for the high school class, his daughter-in-law said that they would no longer attend Sunday school because his grandchildren had a problem with what he believes.

I believe that at least subconsciously, he realizes that if my theology is correct and salvation is by grace not works, then he loses fear as a tool to control his family.

#### *Appropriate Biblical Stories*

During a school vacation week, knowing that I would have a smaller than normal bible study group (which he regularly attends), I decided to take a break from regular

teaching and tell the story of the prodigal son for his benefit. The only people there were the care-receiver, his wife, a spiritually mature older couple, his forty-something daughter, and my husband.

The reason I have chosen this story is that it so beautifully tells the gospel story in terms of God's grace. It also shows a father who is not controlling and who loves and cares for his children unconditionally.

I have planned the questions outlined below. I am not sure how this will go, I would rather it be a one-on-one conversation, but this is the best I can do and feel it is better than not addressing the situation at all.

#### *Description of the Storytelling Session*

After telling the story, I focused on the care-receiver's daughter. In a very lighthearted manner, I said, "You are the expert on being a sibling here! Tell me what this story says about you and your brother." To my surprise, she said, "I am the oldest in our family too and I resent the part of the story where the father doesn't punish the younger son." If this was a story where the Father represents God, then she has a real problem with God. She said it isn't fair for the younger brother to be welcomed back into the family and its wealth without any consequences. She said, "I can't believe that God doesn't punish us when we sin. He wouldn't just let us back into his family. It wouldn't be right."

I realized immediately that she was talking about deep seated jealousy that she felt for her brother. Her brother had done extraordinarily well in his business and had acquired a lot of wealth. I don't know that he had ever done anything "wrong" to "deserve" punishment from his father, but there certainly were a lot of reasons for his

sister to be jealous. She, on the other hand, was on her second marriage – both marriages had been to less than ideal men. This time she had married a very angry and bitter man who had been unemployed much of the past several years. He was always looking for a get rich scheme and always failing. He did not have a college education which caused problems since her family was highly educated.

Her statement that she believed God couldn't forgive and forget until after he had punished us needed exploring. I believe that she spoke for her father too. I asked her if that belief was just logical to her or if she had determined it from studying scripture. She said that it was logical and that she didn't think God was being fair otherwise – and God is always fair. The care-receiver, her father, was quiet through all of this. But I could tell he didn't like where I was going. He refused to look up at me and I could tell was growing angry.

I asked if anyone could relate to the younger brother in the story. Had anyone ever been forgiven for anything when they didn't deserve it? The male of the older spiritually mature couple spoke up and with a happy look on his face said, "Every single day! God forgives us every day and none of us deserve it." His words hung in the air. No one responded until I said, "That is beautiful!" He talked about how he was glad God wasn't fair, because if God was fair we would all be doomed. He was glad that God wants us back.

Then the care-receiver spoke up and said, "I don't think so. I don't think the Father forgave the younger son until he apologized to him." God doesn't forgive us until we do our part.



My husband spoke up then. I had not told him what I was going to do that night. He, like everyone else, just thought we were doing something a little differently simply because we knew we would have a small crowd that night. But my husband laid out the story of the cross for the care-receiver. He talked about how we had all sinned and how one sin was no different from another sin. He talked about how since God was perfect, even our apologies couldn't put us right with God again. We had blown it. Then Jesus took upon himself our sins at the cross. And that it is our faith – our desire to trust Jesus, to follow Jesus, to be in relationship with God through Jesus that makes us right with God again. Jesus did all the work and all we can really do is say thank you. All the younger brother could do was thank the father – he couldn't earn it even by apologizing.

I went on to address repentance. I talked about how different denominations see repentance differently. Some see it as nothing more than a heartfelt apology, but others see it as a desire to turn from evil to God. I pointed out that the brother turned from evil toward the father the day he decided to come home.

The care-receiver was unconvinced, but determined not to talk any more about it. He had said that he had said his piece and wasn't going to change his mind.

### *Outcome*

The outcome of this situation was nothing more than a seed being planted. The care-receiver did not acknowledge that God's word spoke to him in any way. The daughter of the care-receiver only confirmed that scripture played almost no role at all in their theology. The meeting ended and they went home seemingly unchanged. The care-receiver is one of the few people I mistakenly evaluated as mature spiritually during first

impressions; I later realized that he was not. My heart hurts for the great pain he feels and causes his family by trying to control their every move and thought.

### *Participant's Evaluation*

Three months later, the care-receiver continues to believe (and again, I think it is so he can control others with fear) that salvation is through works. His daughter's heart is softer, but again, as far as I know, she continues to believe that part of God's justice is not forgiving others until they have paid back their wrongs. But both of them have clearly heard the word of God and I pray that they will one day put their trust in the teachings of Jesus instead of making up theology to fit their need for control and power. My prayer is that other Christians will teach and live out the gospel before this family so that one day they may understand God's grace. Not only would it connect them with the living God, but I think it would release the jealousy and anger from their lives that they feel justified in holding towards others.

### **Case Study 3: Death of an Infant – January 20, 2006**

#### *Background*

The care-receivers are young parents who have one healthy child and have just found out that they are going to lose their newborn infant due to a genetic defect. I do not know much about them as I am on call as a volunteer hospital chaplain and have just met them. What I do know is that the wife professes to be a Christian. The husband does not. The wife is glad I am there, but the husband would prefer I leave and has been quite rude to me. I assure him that I can leave at any time he wishes, but I am glad to stay too. He has quieted down now that he knows that he is in control. His mother is there too.

During our introduction, she has expressed that Southern Baptists do not believe in hospital chaplains and certainly not in women chaplains. The wife however, wants me to stay and is leaning on me for support.

#### *Description of the Problem as the Care-receiver Understands It*

During the four hours that follow before the parents are ready for the life support to be disconnected, the wife asks me privately, “If God is powerful enough to save my child, why won’t he do it? How can he let my heart break this much when he can keep me from experiencing so much pain?”

#### *Spiritual Assessment*

The wife is at a very critical point in her relationship with God. Everything she has learned and believed about God is in question now. And although she wants to trust God, she wonders how she can trust a God who would stand by and allow this to happen.

#### *Appropriate Biblical Stories*

I decide to take a chance and tell her of a time when Jesus asked for something and God said no too. I tell her about Jesus in the Garden the night before he died. I hope this will initiate new thoughts for her about why we follow God and help her get through what is most certainly going to be a very challenging period in her life.

#### *Description of the Storytelling Session*

I tell her, “There was a time when God told Jesus no too.” She looked at me shocked. I go on, “Remember what Jesus asks for in the Garden of Gethsemane the night before he was crucified?” She said, “Yes, that God would take the cup away from him.” Then I told her the story of that night in the garden.

I also told her that the author of Hebrews gives us even more insight and further interprets the story for us. The author of Hebrews tells us that Jesus cried with a loud voice and with tears that God would rescue him from death. And God heard these prayers, but did not rescue Jesus. Jesus went on towards the cross in obedience. God said no so that Jesus might save all of us. God allowed it to happen so that Jesus could have a real purpose for all of humanity.

She said, "So Jesus knows how I feel right now?" I said, "Yes. He knew that God had the power to save him from death, but said no. And he was still obedient to God. He knew God loved him, but was allowing his death to happen to save humanity. God loves you and your child. He does not want you to suffer either, but he is allowing this horrible thing to happen for a reason."

Her next question was, "What is the reason?" I didn't know. The author of Hebrews said that God let Jesus suffer so he could be the source of salvation for all who obey him. I told her that if I had to guess, she too will become a source of comfort and testimony to others who are suffering. But what I do know is that Jesus knows how you feel and unlike the disciples he is sitting with you awake right now suffering with you. He suffered with you on the cross and he is present with you now too.

I told her later on whenever she felt like she could not trust God to read the story of Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane and ask God to speak to her through it.

### *Outcome*

This woman was very spiritually mature and calm. She didn't want easy canned answers that you can put on a bumper sticker. She wanted truth and was willing to struggle with it.

The nurses eventually disconnected the baby from life support and the mother held it until it passed into the arms of God. I then asked if I could hold the baby and held it until she was ready to leave. I wanted her last memory of the baby that night to be tucked safely in someone's arms and not lying alone in a hospital bassinet.

### *Participant's Evaluation*

Because of hospital policy, I was unable to contact the family 3 months later. However, I did share the story with the other hospital chaplains. They felt I had taken a big risk telling her the story. Their approach would have been just to listen to her – not to try and give her answers. This – just listen, don't offer answers – is an approach chaplains are most often taught. While I think it helps the care-receiver feel good towards the chaplain, it doesn't do much for their long term well being. My approach gave her scripture that she could take with her as she healed from her daughter's death rather than just remembering a nice chaplain who was present.

### **Case Study 4: Jabez and the Business Man – May 5, 2009**

#### *Background*

The care-receiver was a forty something successful business owner. He had started his firm in reaction to not being treated as well as he felt he should be treated by the company he worked for. He is a hard worker and can get lost in his business. Initially, he comes across as a shy but pleasant person. He has a wife and family. He is the picture of someone who has achieved the American dream until you catch a glimpse of the hardships he faces from a wife who suffers from borderline personality disorder and parents who insist on controlling even his adult life. He has grown up in and

continues to attend a tiny church void of basically any spiritual examples. As a child, he did not have access to Sunday school or youth group. He has had no spiritual direction, does not know the stories of the Bible, and has very poor examples of Christian behavior from his parents. He does not know what it means to follow Christ. But he is aware that what his parents and grandparents have called religion is not worth a whole lot. And I agree, they do not live as transformed people. He is prone to anger which he hides well until he is comfortable with you. Then it is obvious that he becomes easily and almost violently upset when he thinks that his family is not getting the respect they deserve, such as when coaches do not promote his children to the spots he feels they deserve in sports or when anyone criticizes the sometimes bizarre and even violent behavior of his wife.

#### *Description of the Problem as the Care-Receiver Understand it*

The poor economy coupled with an incompetent chief financial officer is driving his company out of business. He wonders if God is allowing this to happen as punishment for accepting insider information on government bids that he won in the past. The insider information is what has fueled his success and given him an advantage over his competitors. He seeks approval from me for what he has done most likely because he plans to do it again. He knows that it is illegal, but, in his words, “isn’t it just how things are done in the business world?”

#### *Spiritual Assessment*

His guilt comes, not from wanting to change, but because the economy is now driving him out of business and he suspects that God may be punishing him. He shows up at my office, not because he wants strength to do better, but because he wants me to tell him that there is nothing wrong with what he has done.

### *Appropriate Biblical Stories*

I decided to tell him the story of Jabez in I Chronicles 4:9-10. I wanted to explore with him what kind of person Jabez might have been for God to bless his business. He will not be interested in hearing how God wants him to change the way he conducts business unless it is his own idea. He is only capable of hearing good things about himself from others and will become enraged otherwise. So this story, while very upbeat, is a back door to helping him conclude what needs to be concluded about his own conduct.

### *Description of the Storytelling Session*

I told him about Jabez – a guy, like himself – who cried out to God for help with his business. We don't know much about Jabez from the two verses recorded about him, but that can be a good thing in storytelling. It allows the care-receiver to hold their own life up to the character in the story.

Then I asked the care-receiver what he thought about Jabez. He was amused that Jabez probably wasn't done any favors by his mother giving him a negative name. He talked for a while about his parents. His dad hadn't wanted him to quit his job and pursue his own business. Throughout his life, his parents had held him back – isolated him at times from being with people he might have enjoyed and learned from. He loved his parents, but was also disgusted with them. On one hand, he avoided them as often as possible, and on the other hand, they had isolated him so much that he was somehow unable to cut the umbilical cord completely. He would be a much happier person if he could. At any rate, he could immediately relate to the fact that Jabez' mother had handicapped him from birth by giving him an uncomplimentary name. He too had

started off in life with a handicap brought on by parents who would isolate him from other children and opportunities that he might have enjoyed.

Next I pointed out that Jabez was “honored” more than his brothers. What did he think that was all about? The care-receiver indicated that Jabez’ business must have been more successful than his brothers. This was true of the care-receiver too. His siblings were not nearly as successful as he was. But this is not where I hoped it would lead. I wanted him to think about whether he was honorable or not. So I asked, “Do you think him being honorable was measured by the amount of money he brought in or by his character?” The reaction I got was like the reaction I get when I tell my Great Dane to get off the furniture. She pretends that she does not hear me. She sits very still and does not react. This is exactly what he did.

I went on to my next question, “What was it about Jabez that made him so bold as to ask God to help him?” I was surprised by the care-receiver’s next response. He said that he didn’t believe that it was right to ask God for anything for one’s self. He believed that asking God for something was selfish and would bring God’s wrath upon the person asking. It was okay for someone else to ask for you. I became aware that he was in my office because he wanted me to ask God to turn around his business for him.

I pointed out that Jabez did ask and God wasn’t angry, but answered very positively. Here is where things started to open up. The care-receiver expressed that the difference between himself and Jabez was that Jabez was honorable. Jabez had built his reputation on doing what was right, not on letting people give him insider information.

This opened the door to me discussing with him the specifics of doing business in God’s way. God doesn’t call us to be successful, but faithful. Was he willing to be



faithful even if it meant being unsuccessful? He wasn't willing to commit to running his business so it would be honorable in God's eyes. There was too much to lose – surely there was a different interpretation of what God wanted from him than my interpretation. At least his words were honest. He wasn't sure if I was right about God not approving of using the insider information. Otherwise why would God have blessed him with success from using it? After all, he didn't ask for it, it was given to him.

### *Outcome*

This approach gave the care-receiver food for thought. It also kept my head from being chopped off had I addressed the issue directly. I felt God was working in this man's life. He had a choice before him, to allow God to transform his business or to hold onto success at all costs.

In a first follow up conversation, we discussed what might be the difference between Jabez and other business people. Jabez recognized that God should be in control of his life. Because of this, God blessed him and increased his business. The care-receiver talked about how he didn't know God's will. I think he did, but didn't like what God was saying. He didn't like the answer that God expected him to run his business honorably so he wanted a new answer, one he liked better.

### *Participant's Evaluation*

About three months later, we discussed how honorable people sometimes don't get rich. I didn't want him to think that if he was able to cut off the person giving him insider information on competitor's bids, that God would automatically make him richer than he already was. God wants us to be honorable even when we are doomed. I wanted him to count the cost. I invited him to rely on God for everything. I suggest that he ask

God for his needs and heart's desires and not to depend on his own abilities. And then just let God work.

I felt really good about the conversations. But he stopped coming to church shortly after the last conversation after his wife was caught with another man. I checked in with him from time to time, but he wasn't interested in talking to me further. I read on the internet that he had also been fined several thousand dollars for working without the proper licenses. I believe he was ashamed that his once successful looking life was deteriorating. But I imagine that he would have told me if he had decided to run his business without using insider information. I suspect he has decided that the cost is too high to involve God in his life.

#### **Case Study 5: Discernment – September 1, 2010**

##### *Background*

The care-receiver is a middle aged male in good physical health. He has a good job that he enjoys and is a good provider for his family. His family is dependent on his income. He has a stable and happy family situation with children in college and a wife of twenty plus years. They are a two career family. The wife's career is not at the place where she would like for it to be. There is potential for her to do more in a different city. Moving to another city would make this happen quicker than waiting for the same opportunity where his job is presently located. Her job, while a very honorable position about which she is passionate, does not pay the bills.

### *Description of the Problem as the Care-Receiver Understands It*

The care-receiver has several choices before him. He can stay in the job and city where they have lived for the past 15 years. He likes his job and is doing well. He likes this choice best and it is the safest choice. Or he can take a new job that would allow him to move to many other cities. Change is not appealing to him nor is it a safe choice given the present economic climate and the instability of rebuilding a career at his age and in his profession. But he understands the need for his wife to have an interesting career. He is trying to discern what God would like for him to do.

### *Spiritual Assessment*

The care-receiver seems exceptionally spiritually grounded. He seeks to follow Christ and has a great love for his wife and her well being. However, he feels that God has not spoken to him in this situation. And he feels anxiety between helping his wife find fulfillment in her career and making smart financial decisions.

### *Appropriate Biblical Stories*

I have decided to tell the care-receiver the story of Balaam's talking donkey from Genesis 22-24. God wants Balaam to have direction, but Balaam is not hearing God speak. I hope this story will open up doors for the care-receiver to explore why God seems (or is?) distant and unspeaking.

Also, at times in this story Balaam hears God clearly and other times God wants Balaam to have an important message, but Balaam is unable to hear God. Why? God uses a donkey to get Balaam's attention. What might God be using to get my care-receiver's attention?

### *Description of the Storytelling Session*

The entire story is quite long spanning two chapters, but it is important to tell the entire story, which I do. There is a repeating phrase in this story that I feel will be very important: “the oracle of a man whose eye is clear.”

After telling the story, I begin our discussion by asking the care-receiver what this phrase means to him. The care-receiver responds by saying, “Balaam understands that God is God and Balaam is not.” I ask how that helps Balaam in knowing God’s will. The care-receiver responds that “Balaam is not tempted by all the king’s riches. He is not tempted by the wrong things.”

“How are you like (or not like) Balaam in seeking God in this situation in your life?” The care-receiver points out that, “Balaam withdraws to get alone to seek God.” He says that he does not always do this when he seeks God. He says, “Sometimes I get caught up in the day to day which is concrete and defined. My To Do List is defined. And I am comfortable there. So I ignore God. But when I do seek God, I like to go to a quiet place. Or I like to walk and find God.”

I ask him what he is doing to seek God in determining which direction to go in his life right now. He says that it is on his to do list, but that he hasn’t done it. I ask if he thinks that he might not be hearing God because he isn’t listening for God? “Yes.”

I ask him to tell me about Balak and how he relates to his life? “My wife could be Balak if she were telling me, ‘Do this or that,’ but she isn’t telling me to ask God to bless plans we have already made. She is asking me to figure it out with her.” The care-receiver says that their life is becoming a prayer all of the time. But they haven’t gone off and prayed about this specifically. He says that they pray together all the time. God

is like a third party in all of their conversations. The care-receiver thinks this is a “pretty awesome thing in his relationship.”

I ask him to tell me about the donkey and how she relates to your life? “The donkey is like the reliable trusted friend who has always been there who helps you open your eyes when you have a blind spot. If there is a problem – it is when we are trying to solve something and we both have a blind spot, at times like those, we don’t really have a trusted friend or couple we can go to and tell our story to who can help us discern God’s will.” I ask how they might cultivate that friend or couple who can be their donkey. They have tried in the past, but haven’t found anyone. They had an older couple at one time, but they moved out of state. He points out that it is important that they are a two-career couple so that they understand the issues of the situation. Plus they need to be spiritually mature. And that has been very hard to find. We discuss going through the church directory and locating possible matches and seeking them out.

The care-receiver leaves with two items of homework:

1. How does he set aside intentional time to pray with his wife. I point out that Balaam doesn’t do anything unless or until God tells him to do it. So they should consider this rather than moving forward before they have a clear direction from God.
2. Make a plan to locate couples who can be their donkey.

### *Outcome*

The care-receiver feels he has much to think about. Even though he still does not have an answer to the direction he should be pursuing, he leaves in a better mood than

when he came in. Perhaps he has a sense that God is still there and that he will not be left without a clear answer.

### *Participant's Evaluation*

In the past three months, I have had an opportunity to speak again with both the wife and husband about Balaam and his donkey. They are in agreement with what the problem is. The wife adds that she thinks that they have a history of making choices without a clear word from God. They were taught that when God doesn't seem to speak, move ahead in the direction you think God wants you to go in. Although she doesn't think this has disappointed God, she is not sure that is a correct way to live and wants to think more about it. She wants to live more intentionally.

She also feels that her husband is so kind that he would sacrifice much for her and is afraid he will sometimes make choices based on wanting to make her happy rather than on what God is saying. He doesn't feel that this is true.

As far as the homework goes, they have set aside a time to pray together daily – in the morning before he goes to work. They say that this works most days. They have not really attempted to pursue finding friends saying that if they end up moving, pursuing local friends would be a waste of time. But they have put some thought into how they will do it once a decision has been made.

### Case Study Evaluations

As outlined in the beginning of this chapter, there are three major areas that I will use to evaluate the case studies: Execution, Follow-up, and Outcome.

## **Execution Evaluation**

The evaluation criteria for Execution are as follows:

**Preparation:** Were any new insights gained in preparing for the storytelling session?

**Telling the Story:** What lessons did I learn from the storytelling session?

It is difficult to judge whether one's own work will be helpful to others. Outside the bounds of this thesis, my next step will be to use the guidebook in teaching several classes within my Presbytery to both lay and ordained leaders. I plan to use this to evaluate the guidebook and update it. However, the case studies have brought up several good points for consideration in future work:

In "Case Study 1: Three Sisters," where the care-receivers were children, it might be beneficial to have a special section in the guidebook especially on how to use storytelling to minister to children. This section should address how to involve parents or other adults in the care giving.

In "Case Study 2: Grace," where I told the story of the prodigal son during a group Bible study since the care-receiver would not meet with me one-on-one, I put the story together using PowerPoint. I used humor and pictures to illustrate the story as I told it. It was very lighthearted and fun. This has demonstrated to me that storytelling can incorporate technology – perhaps art and music too. But that should not diminish how affective a simple storyteller can be without bells and whistles. However, it might be beneficial to address how to use technology and other media such as art or music to tell a story.

Also in “Case Study 2: Grace,” I chose to tell the story in a group setting while directing the story at a particular care-receiver. It is more difficult to address a particular person’s needs in a group setting than in a one-on-one setting. But my hope was that it would ease the tensions of the care-receiver so that he would not think that I was preaching at him. I am not sure this was achieved or not. While my thesis is really directed at one-on-one storytelling, further thought could be put into the effectiveness of group storytelling.

“Case Study 3: Death of an Infant” verified for me that stories can be appropriate even in the throes of a tragedy. One of my seminary professors posed a question to the class one day asking why we often back off from speaking the gospel during times of tragedy. He had observed that people want to hear the gospel then more than ever, but we have been taught that speaking of the gospel when people are vulnerable is manipulative. He pointed out that the gospel is even more relevant during times of tragedy. I believe that this case study demonstrates that he was right. It would be interesting to focus future work on the impact of using storytelling in highly emotional situations.

“Case Study 4: Jabez and the Businessman” caught me unprepared that the storytelling session would evoke the care-receiver to admit to a white collar crime. But I think storytelling disarms people and allows them to open up in ways that they might not normally do. It would be interesting in future research to test the differences between how care-receivers react to traditional counseling versus storytelling and outline the differences. It might suggest to care givers when to use storytelling in counseling and when it is not as effective.



“Case Study 5: Discernment” was a difficult story to tell because it spans so many chapters. But I enjoyed telling it because the care-receiver enjoyed hearing it so much. It seemed to be a real treat for him to relax and hear it. I liked that he and his wife had such a strong and loving relationship. It was a delight to work with them.

### **Follow-up Activity Evaluation**

The evaluation criteria for Follow-up Activities are as follows:

**Immediate Follow-up:** Was the follow-up discussion with the storyteller immediately following the story appropriate? What lessons did I learn from the immediate follow-up discussion?

**Post Care Activities:** Were follow-up activities or homework suggested? Were they beneficial? What lessons did I learn from the post care activities?

In all of the case studies where homework was suggested, the care-receivers seemed to enjoy it. But “Case Study 2: Grace” where I did not give homework might have had a more lasting affect if I had. As it was, the subject seemed to die at the meeting’s end. Perhaps I could have asked the group to tell the story to a child that week and get the child’s impressions. Or perhaps I could have asked them to consider reconnecting with a family member who they have not been close to in recent years and reporting back on how it went. Another option might have been to have them select a buddy in the group to call during the week and discuss the story with them. I believe the care-receiver and his daughter could have benefited by staying in the text and thinking it over.

## Outcome

The evaluation criteria for Outcome are as follows:

**Individual Transformation:** What effect did biblical storytelling have on the care-receiver? Did the storytelling sessions initiate transformation? What might I do differently in the future?

**Community Transformation:** Did the storytelling affect the life of the larger community in any way? How might I include or not include the community in the future?

The case studies have taught me several important lessons about transformation. The Holy Spirit works in its own timing and own way. But it is a marvelous feeling to be used by the Holy Spirit to transform people's lives. There were also some things that I would change if I could redo the case studies. For instance, in "Case Study 1: Three Sisters," it might have been good to include the girls' Sunday school teachers in the storytelling thus inviting the larger community to participate. The church was small, but in a larger church, the pastor might not have been able to give the girls as much attention. The Sunday school teachers might have been able to fulfill the same role if given the proper instruction.

In "Case Study 4: Jabez and the Businessman," I believe that I should have connected the care-receiver to some spiritually mature men within the church for support. This did not occur to me until after he had stopped coming to the church. It would have given the church more opportunity to support him and perhaps bond around the biblical story.

In “Case Study 5: Discernment,” it became obvious to me that finding an answer to the care-receiver’s question was not as important as helping him determine a process towards gaining an answer. It is often the journey that brings us closer to God, not the outcome. It demonstrated to me that teaching care-receivers to fish is more important than giving them a fish. Teaching them to look for answers in the stories of the Bible is more important than seeing a positive outcome for a specific situation.

### **Summary**

The case studies have led me to believe that there is not only much goodness that can come from this type of counseling, but that there is much more work that can be done that would enhance the work I have already done. This thesis has allowed me to put together a training manual, test it in my own ministry, but it was not in the scope of this work to field test the manual. I have already set up several classes within my Presbytery where I will be teaching the methodology and sharing the guidebook with the students. Interestingly, young mother’s groups were the first to call me and request that I teach them. When I asked why they felt it would be helpful to them, they said they were interested using stories in caring for their children.

## CHAPTER 6

### REFLECTION

The purpose of this chapter is to reflect on the personal lessons that I have gained using biblical storytelling in pastoral care during the process of writing this thesis. To that end, there are seven stories that I would like to tell the reader.

#### Seven Observations

1. When Joseph was seventeen years old, he slipped off to sleep. I can picture him asleep with his technicolor robe folded neatly at the foot of his bed. He looks like a peaceful, happy young man without a care in the world. But sometime during the night, God told him a story in the form of a dream. It wasn't an ordinary dream so when he woke up the next morning he was excited to tell his older brothers all about it. But the dream made his brothers hate him. And they retaliated by selling Joseph into a life of slavery. Biblical storytelling is dangerous business.
2. God told Ezekiel several stories about the future of his chosen people. And then God told him to act these stories out. He did what God said, drawing pictures, building props, contorting himself into uncomfortable positions. He hoped God's people would hear these stories he was acting out and repent, but they didn't and in the end, he looked like a fool. Biblical storytelling can make the storytellers look foolish.
3. There was a farmer who went out to sow seed in his fields. He loved farming. He loved watching the seed sprout and grow. He loved harvesting it. His wish for each seed was that it would take hold and produce an abundant crop. But only some seed produced a crop. Other seeds seemed to thrive at first only to die quickly. Others

never even took root. Biblical storytelling doesn't always produce the desired effects in those who hear the story.

4. There was a vineyard where the gardener carefully tended the vines. As any gardener knows, the branches of the vines must be attached to the vine in order to produce fruit. Whenever a branch would break from the vine the gardener would pick it up and throw it into the fire. The branch was worthless without the vine. But when a branch remained attached to the vine, it was fed and nourished. It could produce much fruit. Biblical storytelling is the supernatural work of God through us – not done by our own effort.
5. He may have looked like an ordinary man, but he was the creator and sustainer of the universe. He was all powerful and all important. Yet, here he was, sitting down at a meal eating and drinking with his friends. Sometime during the meal, he got up. And he took off his outer clothing and wrapped a towel around his waist. He took the pitcher of water, poured it into a basin, and stooped down. Then he washed his friend's feet. God washed the dirty feet of his friends! Then he said, "Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you." Biblical storytellers are servants who put other's needs before their own.
6. As a child, like all Jewish children, Anna had been told the story of the coming Messiah. But Anna had had a difficult life. Her husband had died seventy-seven years ago and she had been a widow since. Apparently she had no one to care for her and no one to care for so she made the temple her home and worshiped there night and day, fasting and praying. She became a prophetess and kept watch for that

Messiah she longed to see. She prophesied the stories God told her over and over.

But she was eighty-four years old now. She had waited a long time with no evidence that the Messiah was coming. Until the day that she saw Mary and Joseph and the baby. The stories she told were finally rewarded. Biblical storytellers must often be extremely patient repeating the same stories over and over to see the rewards of their labor.

7. Thomas had been following Jesus around for years. But the tragedy of the last few days – Jesus’ torture and death - had left him shaken. In fact, all of Jesus’ friends were distraught as they huddled together in the upper room not knowing what to do. When Thomas left the room where they had gathered, he expected to find the same grief filled room when he returned. But when he returned, his friends were excited and they had a story to tell him. A story he could not believe and could not understand. He demanded answers to the details of their story – how is this possible? They didn’t know. They didn’t have all the answers. They just knew it was true. Biblical Storytellers don’t have to have all the answers.

### Conclusion

The biblical storyteller should know that while they are called to leave the comfort of their studies and tell God’s stories, storytelling is a dangerous business. The care-receivers may think you are a fool. They may reject your story and you. You will have to continually go to God to make sure you are being nourished and guided by him and not your own ego and agenda. Storytelling is the work of a servant and it takes a lot of patience and repetition for your story to be heard. Sometimes you will be called to tell stories you don’t understand and have trouble even believing. The care-receivers will

often be indifferent, if not hostile, to your attempts to tell God's stories. But I encourage you to tell God's stories anyway.

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## VITA

April Lou Nora Love-Fordham

### **Birth:**

December 11, 1961 in Winston-Salem, North Carolina

### **Education:**

- Bachelors of Electrical Engineer (BEE) with a minor in Math, Georgia Institute of Technology, 1983
- Masters of Science in Electrical Engineering (MSEE), Georgia Institute of Technology, 1984
- Masters of Divinity (MDIV), Columbia Theological Seminary, 2006
- Doctor of Ministry (DMin), Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary
  - Residency Studies 2007-2011
  - Expected Graduation May 2011

### **Ordination:**

April 2006 by the Presbytery of Greater Atlanta of the Presbyterian Church (USA)

### **Other Information:**

April spent twenty years managing technology companies before leaving the corporate world and attending seminary. She lives in Atlanta, Georgia and is married to her college sweetheart, Stephen Allen Fordham. They have two sons, Brent and Kit.